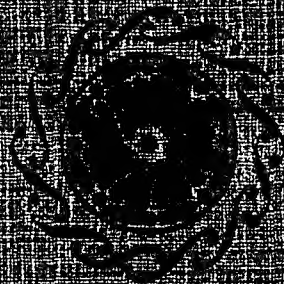


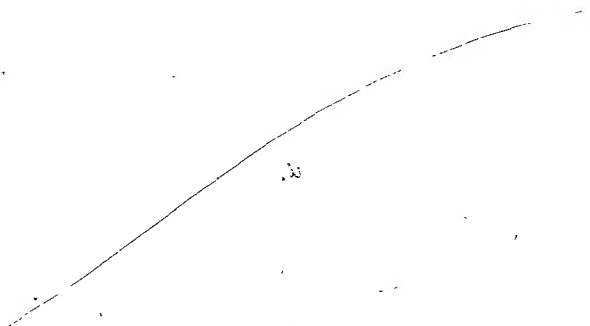
The
VIKING HEART
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1914



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LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.
—*Thomas Gray.*

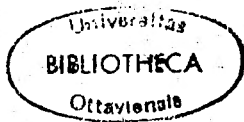
THE VIKING HEART

BY

LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON



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THE VIKING HEART. III

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
AUSTIN BOTHWELL
and
JESSIE ROBSON BOTHWELL
TO WHOM I OWE SO MUCH



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THE VIKING HEART



THE VIKING HEART

THEY THAT GO BEFORE

I

At the edge of the world the sun had dipped his glowing face in a jade sea and the summer twilight had descended—the wonderful twilight of a land of the midnight sun! Hill and dale and valley were wrapped in trailing shadows, light airy shadows like the veils of a thousand elves. They hung like clouds in the deep ravines; they floated ghostlike through the basalt country. They glided over rivers and slid down the hills and everywhere they heralded the evening hour.

A tiny green plateau dreamed in the arm of a crystal fiord; high above it, proud and grim, towered the mountain, a hoary giant beneath whose shade the Fates might spin their tangled web. And down from the mountain's breast tumbled a little brook, clean as young love and bright as morning dew; it laughed and sang on its way to the waiting sea.

Here, amid all this beauty, was the homestead of Einar Halsson. The neat little buildings with their white gables and smooth sod roofs, looked like so many sleepy children huddled together beneath the evening shadows. There were: the main house where the family gathered for recreation, for meals, and to sleep; and the cook house, the store house, a drying house, and a sort of work shop. Each little house had its own white gable but was joined like a Siamese twin to its next neighbor. The doors all faced one way and opened out upon an emerald green field, the precious hay-

field that meant so much to the farmer. Off in the distance were several barns, built partly of timber and partly sod. Back of the farmhouse, on the slope of the mountain, small flocks of sheep were grazing; and knee deep in the shallows of the fiord drowsed several ponies. On their way to the farm the sleek, fat cows stopped to drink at the brook, and the bell on the white leader tinkled cheerily.

In the "badstofa" (living room) Einar and his family were gathered. The occasion was a happy one for he had just returned from the little fishing hamlet where their trading was done and to which he went each winter to join the fishing fleets. Like most fishermen he was somewhat improvident. Why worry when health was his and so much wealth in the waters? he reasoned. Moreover, his farm was a prosperous one—a tiny farm, to be sure, which had been his wife's patrimony, but which was admirably cared for by her and their only son.

He had bought some rock sugar and some dried figs for little Helga and she was dancing about with a bag in each hand. Gudrun, his wife, and Borga, the elder daughter, were comparing their gifts, a grey silk shawl and a little black silk apron.

"Papa, you shouldn't spend so much on us all the time. Why I declare Borga has more aprons already than any other girl in the district. It's ashamed sometimes I feel when I meet the 'prest.' I'm sure he thinks she's growing up ungodly."

Einar laughed loudly. "So it's me can't buy my pretty daughter an apron, is it, and her with the eyes of the lads all following her"—this as he tweaked her heavy brown braids which were looped up like chains and pinned to either side of her head, but even then hung half way down her back.

Carl, the only son, a tall, well-built youth, waited a little impatiently till this silly excitement should pass. HE wanted to talk *sense* to his father.

At dusk the family always gathered together for an hour's rest and recreation as their fathers before them had done for generations, after which they would go back to the fields or to whatever task was in hand. The summers were short and the long winter dim and dreary. Every possible moment of the precious summer light had to be made use of. Usually they settled themselves unceremoniously upon their respective beds which, white and billowy, lined the walls, or upon the "koforts" (trunks) and benches about the big long room. Here they drank their coffee, gossiped of the day's affairs, told stories or read some book. To be sure the reading really began in earnest only when the long winter nights set in, but the custom of making merry was never quite abandoned. To-day, however, was an especial occasion so they all sat around the big table which boasted its finest cloth and the best copper coffee urn.

"Did you hear more talk of the western world?" Carl finally broke in.

"M-m, I should say so, very little else. A ship just landed as I got to town bringing a man from a place they call Keewatin or some such name. You should have seen the excitement! It seems there is so much work in this new country that there isn't half enough people to do it. And the wages! Mamma, it's rich in a year, some expect to get. But, of course, that's foolish. Well—it's all very good for those who have no home, but as for us we're happy here, eh mamma?"

"Yes, God be praised, what more could we get, or need, for that matter in this other land," Gudrun answered.

"That's it! That's the matter with Iceland," Carl blurted out, "everyone satisfied if his stomach is full. We might as well be sheep for all the ambitions we have!"

"Why, Carl, isn't it a shame, you to talk so to your father and him so kind to buy you books and a new saddle."

His father laughed. "Talk, talk—its not always good

to go where the eagle screams, my son. But, you shall hear for yourself what this man says when we go to town again. It's always well to use an ear while we have it. They say it's a fine country with a single hayland sometimes as big as all of Iceland and no lava flats whatever."

"Papa, Brinki told me that if a ship comes this way for settlers in the spring he is going. The seasons are long out there, he has heard, with the sun shining the year around. And the things they raise! Corn and garden truck! And fruits of all kinds just grow wild. Think of it, papa, and us here in this burned-out country with only patches of green here and there and field after field of lava and basalt." Carl's eyes were alight with the dreams of distant places. The old restlessness of the ancient Norsemen—a longing for the new and the strange—a desire which has never wholly left their descendants, was awake in his young veins. His mother shook her head and looked at Einar. But he, with the light-heartedness of the fisherman, to whom life on land is a time to play—for the sea is a hard mistress and no one knows how imperative her demands may become—only laughed. "But mamma, Borga, where's the coffee," he shouted, and as they hurried out to the cook-house he called little Helga. "And how many verses did you learn while papa was away?"

"Oh, not so many, papa. You see, poor Villa got sick—her head came right off and mamma put it on again but she needed a lot of care."

"Oho! I see, so you didn't learn anything, is that it?"

"Yes, I did, papa, I said not so much—I know the evening poem:

The gold of the sunset illumines the deep,
Oh, thus should each evening prepare me for sleep.
A soft cooling breeze with the freshness of dew,
—The ocean a mirror of heavenly blue.

The mountain peaks towering stately around
Are giants on guard where the sky meets the ground.
This sunset foretells that the day shall be bright
That follows the steps of this wonderful night.

She repeated it slowly, with ridiculous dignity and solemnity. Her father and brother both roared with laughter.

"Now, papa," Gudrun rebuked him, as she came in with the coffee and a great dish of pancakes, "it's not right to make fun of the child when she tries to learn something." Einar reached out his arms to the crestfallen Helga. "Come, my little love—papa will buy you an apron like Borga's. It's not at the child I laughed, Gudrun. It's at her so smart to say a verse like that which she can't understand."

"But I do, I do, papa—it's only a looking glass out of water and a giant in the mountain. I always knew that, papa, because I see things in the fiord all upside down and even to-day I heard the giant growl in the mountain."

They laughed at this and Einar kissed her, saying: "It's not every man who has a little girl so smart." And then, "But we must be about the cutting. There should be a nice lot of hay by now. Run, little love, and get papa his book."

Helga ran to a little shelf in the corner and took down her father's Bible. They all settled back in their seats very grave, very quiet. Borga and Gudrun picked up their knitting but Carl stared out through the window before him over the soft, green field with eyes that saw not, for they were turned inward searching—seeking.

With his hand stroking little Helga's golden head as she curled up at his feet, the father read in a slow solemn voice from the Psalms ending with the verses:

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
and plenteous in mercy.

"He will not always chide; Neither will he keep his
anger forever.

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear him."

"God give us grace to understand the reading of Thy word and to abide by it. Amen," he finished.

Helga jumped up and kissed him. "Now I'm going to come out with you, too. It would do my Villa good to sit in a soft little haycock." They left the cheerful room and went outside into a fairyland of northern beauty. Gudrun caught her breath. It was dear to her, this land of her fathers. And the everlasting miracle of the summer nights was always new to her.

"Einar, what could we be thinking of to leave all this?" She swept her hand toward the fiord that ran to meet the sea. Where would we find more loveliness or more contentment?"

He patted her shoulder, she was very dear to him, this serious wife with her pretty thoughts and willing hands. Then he followed Carl into the fields.

The sun had just lifted his smiling face from out the jade sea. The rays of his smile which, fan-shaped, had preceded him, were spreading like threads of gold over a roseleaf and lavender field. On the sea a golden pathway burned—a pathway that the gods might tread from earth to heaven. And all the land was sheathed in soft, warm light. The birds twittered sleepily,—the myriad birds of the northern night—then under the spell of this strange beauty, they sang their praises to the god of little birds. Thrush and nightingale and skylark—the minstrels of the night and the minstrels of the morning liting together in fairy music to the sky.

And the evening and the morning were as one. And the evening and the morning went singing through the land—for this was their hour. But the day was not yet! . . .

Little Helga had just finished saying her evening prayers and was burrowing sleepily into her soft white bed, when a faint tremor like a sigh of weariness ran through the earth. She sat up and listened, more curious than frightened, for such things are not unusual in a volcanic country.

"Mamma," she called, "don't you hear the giant growling?"

Her mother was tired and had almost fallen asleep.

"Hush, child, go to sleep. Your giant is likely snoring."

The little girl considered this with the usual gravity of children and so fell asleep trying to picture this giant, whose very breath had power to shake the earth she walked upon.

And while they slept the sleep of the physically weary, that strange rolling grumble kept on. Against the pale amber of the sky above the mountain's cold, white head, plumes of greenish grey waved in the breeze, and out from the mountain's deep, wide mouth, clouds of murky smoke were slowly coiling.

Another tremor shook the earth, rocking it drunkenly, and a roar like the thunder of a thousand cannons escaped from the mountain. The black clouds rolled out faster, tinged now with darts of angry red, and a peculiar sulphurous odor mingled with the fragrance of the summer night.

The Halssons awoke simultaneously. Einar and Carl leaped from their beds and ran outside. Against a quickly darkening sky, tongues of flame, fiery red, and forked like lightning, leaped and lengthened into pillars of sheer fire. For a moment they were stunned. The mountain towards whose lofty summit they had so often gazed enraptured, whose brow so long had worn a snowy crown, where moonbeams lingered and the sunlight flashed, had without warning turned loose upon them the smouldering fires of its pent-up rage.

Another and another thunderous clap galvanized them into action. They rushed back into the room and flung them-

selves into their clothes. Gudrun and Borga were already dressing little Helga in feverish haste. The awful rumbling never ceased and the nauseating fumes of sulphur became more and more pronounced.

They all talked at once. Einar thought it best to take their valuables and go by rowboat down the fiord a way till they could better judge of the seriousness of the eruption. Gudrun wondered audibly what could be done about the cows and Carl thought of the sheep—many of them were his own, the wages of his patient toil upon the farm.

"Don't get excited, don't get excited," Einar implored the women as they ran hither and thither gathering up odd bits of apparel and articles dear to them. Little Helga ran about crying shrilly, "Where's my Villa, where's my Villa," until the distracted mother restored that much mended wooden doll to her arms.

"Don't get excited, don't get excited," Einar cried again, running about in circles himself. "It may not amount to much—only noise and smoke. As for the cows and ponies they are likely well off along the fiord by now."

As if in rage at this disparaging of its evil intent, the volcano rent the air with a volley of thunderous explosions too terrible for words. Helga screamed and Gudrun caught the little flying figure close against her breast to reassure her.

"Quick, quick," Einar commanded, now fully aroused, "run to the boats! No words, no words! Carl and I will follow with the bundles." They obeyed him and rushed out. Already the smoke was so dense that it hung in heavy clouds over the countryside; it seemed more like night than the break of day. Gudrun turned as she ran across the field. "Carl, Carl," she called, "open the pens and let the calves out."

They had just reached the boats, two strongly made rowboats which they had used for many a season and had just

pushed them into the water of the fiord when the men came running with their awkward loads.

There was a little lull in the ominous thundering and then they all heard quite clearly the sharp, quick, imperative barks of their shepherd dog upon the smoky slope.

Carl gave an exclamation and broke into a run back across the field.

"For God's sake," his mother called; "where are you going?"

"Do you think me more heartless than a dog? Don't you hear him trying to get the silly sheep down off the slopes?"

"Oh, Carl, oh, Carl!" But he went on into the smoke.

"Papa, why didn't you stop him?"

Einar shrugged helplessly, "Can an eagle be stopped from flying? There is as yet no real danger."

Just then a pillar of liquid fire shot high into the sky, a fearful and an imposing sight—up, up, with a swiftness unbridled and a force unrestrainable, it rocketted on its way and fell again in a million stars to the earth below.

"Now may God have mercy!" Gudrun cried.

A clap from the volcano answered this and the thing they most dreaded came at last. A grinding, grating sound which gathered in volume, a horrible breaking and cracking, and then—an avalanche of rock hurtling down the mountain side.

Another pillar of flame, leaping skyward like a rejoicing devil, lit up the whole dreadful scene for one awful moment.

There upon that doomed slope Gudrun saw the tall figure of her son—before him little fleeing forms of white and a dark creature that raced about wildly.

With a wild cry she leaped out of the boat and started across the field. Einar caught her back.

"No, no, mamma, you will be killed!"

She fought him fiercely—a Viking mother ready for the funeral flames of her beloved—it was but a momentary mad-

ness. When it passed that other horror had ended also, and somewhere in the heap of earth and rock which they saw piled in jagged hillocks almost to the very doors of the once secure little home, Carl, their only son and the hope of their old age lay dead, together with his sheep and his faithful dog—a Viking turned shepherd and buried in the same mound with his flock.

"Oh, what have I done that this should come upon me," Gudrun sobbed as Einar led her back to the boats where the terrified girls crouched.

"My son, my son, so good, so dutiful! Have mercy; O Lord!"

The flames and smoke were by now pouring out in a steady stream from the volcano, and over the top that only the day before had been gleaming in snow, thick streams of hot lava rolled on their destructive way. And ashes and cinders fell in ever-increasing volume over the land, kindling fires that were spreading rapidly, or fell into the fiord with angry hissing sounds.

Einar, seeing that Gudrun was so stunned by Carl's tragic death that she seemed scarcely to realize the ever-increasing danger to the rest of them, knew that it was useless to expect help from her. They would all have to go in one boat now. He ordered Borga to get in with Helga and their mother. Then, throwing all the bundles into the empty boat, he made it fast to their own by the anchoring rope.

"You will have to row, Borga," he said, fitting the oars for her. "Quick, child! Rouse yourself! Wet your shawl and Helga's and wrap it well about you." Then having taken two homespun spreads from the bundles, he wrapped them about Gudrun and himself, first wetting them freely.

As they were pulling out from the shore, they caught the sound of furious riding and a company of some twenty men and women together with several children, came dashing along the road that wound around the mountain base and over Einar's land. Without stopping they yelled at him to

hurry. The other side of the mountain was already in flames, the wind, though slight, being turned that way.

"The fire will spread," they called, "and the wind may rise and turn. It's a long way by water." Then they vanished into the smoke on their sure-footed little ponies.

Einar pulled at the oars as only those who are bred to the water can. Behind him was a belching furnace, ruined hopes, and death. Ahead lay the open sea and life. What more—he knew not.

II

Early in October, 1876, a bedraggled and sorry company en route for Winnipeg reached Fisher's Landing, the then insignificant and unattractive town of mud flats and slough-infested prairie lying at the fork of the two great rivers, the Red River of the North and her tributary the Assiniboine.

There was nothing unusual about this band of people, certainly nothing startling, unless the observant considered the greatness of their number and the extremes of their poverty.

At least once yearly since 1872 Fisher's Landing had received and sent forth again their like and fellow countrymen in varying numbers but never before nor since such a multitude as this.

With that same eagerness to venture into distant fields which characterized their Norse ancestors, this company of fourteen hundred Icelanders severed every tie and left their little country, so laden with sorrows yet so rich in tradition, for this wide land whose shores their ancient seamen once had sounded. With mixed emotions they quitted their island home with her barren shores and mountain fastnesses interspersed with oases of valley verdure where rivers laugh and streams leap down the hillsides, where birds sing sleepily to the midnight sun and flocks of sheep, like tufts of thistledown, fleck the green. With vain regrets

they forsook their blue-green fiords where call the voices of the ocean and her mists like Dices of the morning beckon and where the ghosts of dead Vikings sail toward the moonlit seas. But in this case they took leave with no regret of those angry giants, never long sleeping, the volcanic peaks of their unfortunate country.

For once again, one of her many volcanoes had poured forth its destruction over hapless Iceland and the period prior to 1876 was one of unusual suffering and distress even in that land of great privations. In addition to the losses and suffering brought about by this last eruption the fishing in Iceland waters—the one industry upon which the people then depended—had greatly fallen off. So unproductive were the fisheries that large numbers of people were rendered destitute and were on the verge of starvation.

Hunger is a sharp sword and severs every tie. It was therefore with relief and a high hope before them that these people listened to laudation of the Great Canadian West and fell victims to the exaggerated promises of the Land of Plenty.

Canada was in need of immigration. She needed immigrants, as all new countries need them, to rid her lands of timber and destructive beasts, to break her virgin soil and prepare it for useful crops. She needed them also to build roads and bridges, to bind her towns more closely together, and to dig ditches and lay sewers that her cities might be habitable. She was in need of them—and appropriated them—to make possible the progress of civilisation and to lay the foundation for her coming greatness. Her call went out into the highways and the byways and penetrated even that lonely island in the North Sea so long forgotten and so little known of men.

But the Icelanders are not of peasant ancestry; he is not an agriculturist by instinct or inclination, nor is he a creature all brawn who may labor from sunrise to sunset without those pangs which are the penalty of intelligence. There-

fore certain men, picked from among the Icelanders who first immigrated to Canada, settling temporarily in Ontario, and delegated by them to deal with the Canadian authorities, went ahead into the wilderness of Manitoba and finally chose and had granted to them by the Government, Townships eighteen and twenty-three inclusive, range three and four east, including Big Island. Here, they decided, even the most wretched might subsist upon the natural resources of the water, and here, for a people used to the fishing industry, they predicted a promising future.

The October sun was already high in the heavens and long shadows lay upon the river banks when the first crew of boats with their convoy were ready to set out upon the two days' journey to Winnipeg. These boats were crude affairs, huge flat-bottomed things that ploughed through the water with a persistence and patience of some gigantic river turtle. But, as with most other homely things, they possessed at least one virtue—into their spacious holds an entire family sometimes crowded, and thus gave those wanderers the comfort of each other's company and permitted the small joy of sharing one another's misery.

But there was no lack of smiles or laughter, when these first boats left with their loads of tired passengers. These folk had grown close to one another in that tender fellowship which only co-sufferers know—they were a great family, with similar hopes and ambitions; they had enjoyed friendly rivalries and on occasions hot, flaring arguments. Yet each man wished his companion well, for poverty sets men side by side as equals compelling them to recognise that they are of like perishable flesh and subject to its weaknesses and failures. It is only with the accumulation of wealth that men cease to be brothers and measure each other's commercial value and possible benefit to self.

So, withal, it was a merry scene upon the banks of the "Old Red" that day at Fisher's Landing. Children ran about wild with freedom after their long incarceration.

Women were intent upon sorting out baggage and trying rather futilely to brush and make decent their homespun clothes. Down by the water the men busied themselves preparing boxes in which to float the surplus cargo. In some ingenious way these boxes were covered in canvas and then tarred that they might be waterproof and could be floated on poles through the water.

These simple labors were eagerly pursued by the immigrants. It buoyed them up spiritually to be once again busy about their own affairs. Inconsequential chatter and merry sallies called forth much laughter and the very air seemed laden with the spirit of their happiness. Mothers sang and little babies with pinched faces waved their little hands and crowed with delight. Young women with the bloom faded from their round cheeks smoothed their braids and glanced shyly toward the group where the slim broad-shouldered lads were gathered.

In every face a great relief was recorded with fervent gratitude that so much at least of the long and strenuous journey was safely ended. And the Red River, its murky waters winding on its crooked northerly way, was a baptismal stream out of which their God would lead them to the promised land.

In one of the first boats to leave was the unfortunate family of Einar Halsson. They were not the merry lot they once had been. Helga huddled up against Borga in a dejected little heap—Borga who had taken on a look of age beyond her years. As for poor Gudrun, she sat opposite her husband in pathetic silence. Einar looked at her from time to time with a heavy heart, he would have liked to comfort her but felt helpless before the anguish hidden deep in the eyes of her drawn, white face.

She caught her husband's worried look and trying to cast off the burden of her memories asked him if he knew the name of their guide. He did not. But after all, what

did that matter? She thought best to try to show some interest in the new adventure.

"How long till we get to Winnipeg?" Gudrun addressed the guide, a young Iclander in the boat ahead, who had been in the country three years and who was then acting in the capacity of assistant to the immigration agent.

"It generally takes two days if all goes right and the weather stays favorable. What will you do when you get there? Have you friends to meet you?" he returned in question.

Gudrun brushed an imaginary crumb from her knee. "God knows," she replied in the fervent Icelandic way, "there will be plenty of work, so we were told, and there are three of us able-bodied."

The young man, letting his boat drift, shot an inquisitive look toward young Borga, where she hunched in the far end of the boat. And she, feeling his gaze upon her, blushed scarlet and bent unnecessarily low over the brown sock she was knitting.

He had noticed her on shore, attracted by her long, free stride and her singular grace of carriage. A graceful walk, like a lovely speaking voice, is a rare gift not often possessed by a girl so young. He had further marked that she was tall and as yet somewhat angular—a type of woman late in maturing and slow to grow old. He saw now on closer scrutiny that her face, wreathed in a splendid mop of nut-brown hair, was not pretty—this he was sure of, having in mind a preconceived idea of feminine beauty. But it was an interesting face, he concluded—the forehead perhaps a little high for a woman and the lips too straight, but the nose was clearcut with spirited nostrils, making him wish the rest of her face were equally charming.

As if to challenge this unspoken desire, Borga lifted her eyes to look fully at her foolish critic and that poor young man's heart missed a beat and his oar nearly slipped into the water.

"Hold my head while I kick myself for a fool," he muttered, swinging his boat into midstream, in obvious haste to get away, and to himself, "No, she isn't pretty, but she certainly has the eyes of a witch."

And Borga, emboldened as the distance widened between the boats, gazed after him with her deep violet eyes, eyes as dark as the secluded pools of her mountain country and as unfathomable, thinking him a very pleasant young giant and that the way the sun turned his tawny hair to gold reminded her of Sigurd the Volsung and the Rhinegold. And bending again above her knitting she began to dream—fantastic dreams, a mixture of tales often heard and well learned and her own youthful fancies.

The afternoon wore away uneventfully, and for the most part cheerfully. It was a welcome change for the people to drift along on the peaceful river in the fragrant autumn air. There was music in the continual lapping of the water as it rose and fell against the boats.

Sometimes an exuberant young lad challenged his neighbor and away the boats would go in a clumsy race. For the most part, however, a continual steady pace was kept by every boat, for it was of the greatest importance that they should reach Winnipeg as soon as possible.

As the sun set, bathing the river in a crimson and amber glory, casting a ghostly glimmer over the ragged autumn woods on either side, there flashed into sight from beyond a bend in the river a craft, long and slender, cleaving the water with the swiftness and silence of thought. And the foreigners from the far north country saw their first red man. A splendid native, straight and supple, like some bronzed god baring his copper chest indifferent to the elements, he bore down upon them. For one fleeting moment he appeared as if painted against the crimson sky, then rounding the bend drifted into the shadows of the farther shore.

So swiftly had he come, so swiftly had he gone, that

he might have been but a wraith, or the incarnated spirit of the old Red River and her vanishing children. The immigrants were impressed and amazed, and fell to re-accounting one to the other every tale of a redskin they had ever heard until the timid peered nervously about them into the gloom, half suspecting the surrounding woods of hiding countless hordes that any moment might rush down upon them.

The shadows deepened, and the chill mist from the river rose about them. Those who were not laboring at the oars felt the cold creeping over them and shivering and stiff they were once again aware of their exile and their misery. Yet now and again, a song broke out upon the air but something being lacking in the hearts of the singers it invariably died out unfinished.

Tired mothers hushed their whimpering children but as the hours dragged on this grew more difficult and little ones who were not overcome with sleep raised their lusty voices in protest against the scheme of things.

Finally it was decided to make camp for a few hours. While the women settled the babies as comfortably as possible on the ground, the men built a fire and soon they were enjoying the luxury, not alone of heat, but of that beverage so dear to the Icelanders, his never-failing coffee.

Einar Halsson improvised a sort of tent with shawls and an old quilt, beneath which on a pile of brushwood he placed a feather-tick he had brought from the old country. Here Gudrun and the child Helga were glad to seek their rest almost immediately. After doing what he could for their comfort he rejoined the men about the fire, which they intended to keep going all night and where they were to take turns in sleeping.

Borga was weary, too. For hours she had held in her arms her delicate little sister, trying to keep her warm with the heat of her own strong young body. Yet now, when she

also might lie down and rest, she sat outside the makeshift tent and stared out over the river.

"Don't you think you had better sleep?" The voice came from the shadows beyond the tent. Perhaps she had expected some such thing. Young hearts have a mode of communication more wonderful than wireless and more certain. At any rate she was not startled.

"Yes, but I like it here," she replied in the calm, deliberate way which was habitual to her.

The young man hidden from her in the darkness felt again strangely disturbed. This slim girl with the deep inscrutable eyes and the soft, slow speech, had captured his fancy. He had a panicky moment, in which he felt the wiser part of valor were to fly; then he laughed, a low musical laugh with something of recklessness in it.

"Look," he said, crossing the space between them and sitting down beside her, "there are the eyes of Thiassi. How often I have looked for them of nights in the old land while I watched my sheep."

And then they grew very merry as they gazed up at the two big yellow stars that once, according to the Skald, had been the eyes of the Storm Giant, Thiassi.

"And the poor daughter of the giant tried to live in the warm land of the gods—I wonder if it will fare as ill with me in this big strange country," Borga said.

"What an idea," her companion retorted, surmising how much of seriousness there lay behind the jocular remark. "But say, do you remember what the poor god said when his turn came to go into her country?"

She nodded, "Do you?"

Drear are the hills
And long the nights
Hateful the voice
Of the howling wolves,
Of the growling bears,
And the eagles wild.

I long for the lapping
Of waves on the shore
And the swansong clear
That I hear no more.

he chanted for her.

"You should be a preacher," Borga flattered him shyly, "you chanted that so well. But don't you think the daughter of the snows makes a good report in the myth:

Sleep had I none
By thy hateful waves,
For the noise of thy swans
And thy seamews' cries.
Oh for my mists
And my mountains grim,
No more will I bide
By the smooth sea strand.

Chanted in Borga's low smooth voice, the verse took on a charm it never had held before.

"Isn't it a little unusual for a girl to know the sagas so well?" he asked her.

"Perhaps," she replied, "but mamma was taught all these things. Her father was quite well off once and went to school in Copenhagen," she answered simply.

"And you, what would you like to do?" he wanted to know.

"Oh, so much, but first I must work," she answered with the optimism of youth.

So they chatted on in subdued voices, while the moments sped away in swift succession. But there is a limit even to the endurance of youth, and Borga's visitor seeing the weariness in her face rose up to go.

"Well, I'll have to get a little sleep," he told her, "we'll be starting early in the morning."

She stood up also, and for a moment they remained standing in silence, measuring each other with their clean young eyes, by the light of the stars that gleamed in the great

dome above them. Then he went away, fading into the shadows out of which he had come.

In the hurry and bustle next morning, Borga saw nothing more of her new friend, nor indeed was she destined to exchange further speech with him on the river journey. To be sure she caught sight of him now and again, for even in that bevy of boats far ahead it was easy to single him out by his bright, tawny hair and the breadth of his shoulders. And once, when by chance, or some manœuvre on his part, his boat dropped back a little closer to the immediate group where the Halssons were, he waved his arm in wide, graceful greeting and somehow the day became brighter and the muddy waters of the river became a fairy highway.

And this day, like the one before it, wore itself away and the shadows were black and heavy when a sudden shout from the boats ahead told those who were bringing up the rear that the town of their objective was at last sighted.

To the tired people straining their eyes toward the shore it was not an impressive sight. Just a few dim, glimmering lights along the low, sloping bank, and, as they drew closer to where the two northern rivers meet, a silhouette of low buildings, and down on the water front a long ambling shell of a house rightly named the "immigration sheds."

It was too late when they finally landed for any disposal to be made of them. So huddling down upon the floors they prepared to await the morning.

Early next day the men appointed by the government to take charge of the immigrants, and to do what was their best, or at least to do what then was possible for them to do, set about the difficult task of interviewing the newcomers by means of their interpreter and agent, to learn if possible, the capabilities and means of each person and family. This was simplified somewhat in certain cases where the individual considered had friends who had immigrated in previous years and were now settled in the town and who temporarily took charge of the new arrivals. But most were

without friends or money and pinned their only hope upon the Canadian government.

It was no easy matter to settle the destiny of so large a multitude, and the officials in charge of the work of distributing the immigrants really did their best. It was decided that those who had no visible support and were encumbered with families should proceed at once to the shores of Lake Winnipeg where the future colony was to begin that they might get some manner of shelter erected before the cold weather set in. They were to be furnished with such tools as they might need and supplied with food until such a time as they could shift for themselves. On the other hand men and women without ties were sent off to whatever work it was thought they could best do.

When it came time for the Halssons to go through the ordeal of examination by the short, sharp-eyed, dapper little man who interviewed them through the medium of the agent, it was getting late in the day and the patience and temper of every one was at breaking point.

"This man has no money, I suppose?" the little official barked out addressing the agent.

"No, but he is strong and willing to work."

"Hm, I might have spared the question. Has he a trade?"

"Well, not exactly. He was a fisherman," the agent answered patiently.

"He'll get a chance to fish all right," this executor of destiny informed them, suddenly jocose, mopping a red and perspiring forehead with a dirty silk handkerchief. "How many children?" he snapped.

"One child and this girl of sixteen," the agent replied, pointing to Borga where she stood beside her mother while they nervously awaited the outcome of the interview.

"Well, we can send the man and his wife and the child down to the lake with the other families, but this girl," running his sharp eyes over her strong lean body, "she can go

to work. There are several farmers in need of just such girls."

The agent explained to Einar and Gudrun what had been said. They had nothing to say, being conscious that beggars may not be choosers. It was futile to argue the point. Gudrun unconsciously tightened her hold upon Borga's arm and each pressed closer to the other as if the proximity of their flesh reassured them of their spiritual love. They had expected to work, had thought with gladness of the idea of labouring for their mutual benefit, but it had somehow not occurred to them that they must be parted. The word all at once took on a grim meaning—they had seen the desolation of the wide spaces separating human habitation in this strange new land.

"When will we have to go?" Gudrun asked in a voice out of which all life had gone, but which she strove to keep even.

The dapper gentlemen, little knowing what a terrible sentence he had pronounced upon them and busily scribbling in a book, grunted through teeth firmly clenched upon an old pipe, that he guessed some time to-morrow.

"We got to get rid of this bunch," he grumbled, "before the rest get here."

The hours that followed were very bitter. Borga sat between her mother and her little sister on a grimy bench against a grimy wall. About them tobacco smoke and stale air swirled in snake-like wraiths. Children cried and called for bread. Men and women rushed about nervously with the terrible tense energy of caged animals. The place buzzed with ceaseless noises. People stumbled over and against bundles and boxes. They whispered and they talked at the top of their voices. They coughed and they sneezed. They implored silence of their babies and were themselves more noisy than they. Altogether the place was hideous and humid with the heat and the indescribable odor of

humanity that had been denied for so long the privileges of cleanliness.

But Gudrun sitting with tight lips and a heavy heart, holding in her toilworn hand her daughter's slim young fingers, noted none of these things. She saw only in the foolish way of mothers, a little round-eyed girl with unruly brown hair that clung about her skirts and all but tripped her feet. She remembered the bruises that had needed caressing, she recalled the fingers that kisses had had to heal. And all this seemed such a little, little while ago.

She thought again with renewed sorrow of the tall, strong son Iceland had taken from her and she looked with hopeless eyes on the daughter whom this new land was taking away.

As for Borga, she tried to assure herself that this was the great opportunity. She would work hard and save her money—she had never handled a piece of money in her life—she saw visions of herself returning to her mother loaded with luxuries. A few months—no more, and they would all be happy again and together. But her heart beat faster and her breath came harder each time she encountered her mother's stricken glances. Yet they said nothing. The Iclander, like his country, often hides under a cold exterior the hot fires of mighty passions.

Later in the afternoon, Einar, who had been out in some other part of the building, together with a number of others, learning the plan of campaign for the ensuing trip, hurried up to them dusty and tired and dejected looking.

"I wish this were over," he mumbled, sinking down upon the bench beside his wife. Then, as if it were not the principal thing on his mind, "There is a man outside for whom Borga is to work. The agent just got hold of him. They will be in at any moment to see you."

Gudrun looked at her husband anxiously—there were a dozen questions in the glance.

"He seems a friendly man, to judge hastily," he assured her.

Just then a great bulk of a man loomed up in the doorway, and with the agent at his side came toward them slowly in long, lazy strides. The old reefer he wore hung about him indifferently and swished against his high boots—to Borga the sound was that of marsh grasses brushing noisily together on a wet and windy day.

He paused in front of them, pushed his cap farther back on his head with an enormous red hand—an act of respect to the two timid women gazing at him so expectantly—shifted the tobacco about in his mouth and greeted them, as a matter of form, in English which was only so much jargon to them.

Gudrun saw with relief that this man into whose keeping she must yield her daughter, wore the broad, open look of kindly natures, that have lived and let live, in the wild free places. His brown, weather-beaten face, large and roughly hewn, might have been the face of some shepherd philosopher grown mellow and a little amused at the ways of this life. Indeed he had a trick, grown into an unconscious habit, of shutting one eye slyly in a perpetual wink at "the gods of things as they are." His eyes were a washed out blue—the kind of eyes that have a habit of taking on hues and intensities at the least expected moments. They were mild and merry—they could be cold and very hard. His hair was black, but both his hair and his heavy, ragged beard were generously sprinkled with grey. He looked a terrible giant, but was in reality the kindest of men.

Gudrun and Borga smiled at him their unfeigned relief and the child Helga gazed unaffrightened, fascinated by his huge bulk and strange clothing and smiled, too, a faint, stray little smile.

He spoke in the broad rolling dialect of the Scot, and to the Icelanders it gave the English a closer and infinitely friendlier sound than it had had before.

"Tell the old mother," he commanded the agent, "we'll take good care of the girl—my old woman and me. We're a little rough maybe, but——" here he winked at little Helga as if they held some wild joke in common—"we're pretty decent. Damned decent, sir," he corrected himself and faced the agent.

This was translated—perhaps a bit modified—to the Hals-sons and then they all smiled and the big Scot quite gravely shook them each in turn by the hand. Then turning again to their interpreter he said, "I'll have to be trailing back in about an hour, I'm going now to harness up, and to hunt the old woman. She's traipsing around the Fort trying to cheat the traders into a square deal. Don't you be a-worrying," he stopped to reassure Borga, regardless of the fact that she understood no word of what he said. "My old woman will soon teach you the ins and outs of this here English, then you'll not so much mind being away from your kin." Then, diving into a spacious pocket in the tail of his reefer, he fished out a great handful of prunes and threw them into little Helga's lap. "Like to keep them to chew on along the way," he explained a bit sheepishly to the surprised agent. But the fact was that he kept whatever sweets the primitive country afforded in that big pocket for just such emergencies as this to bring a smile to any little, yearning face that had about it the hungry look of loneliness.

He hurried away and the agent went with him. Gudrun smiled a misty smile at Borga who returned it in kind. Like all acts that spring from generous impulses, howsoever small they may be, this little kindness evoked a gladness out of all proportion to the act, and brought a sense of comfort to the wretched beings about to be scattered into they knew not what manner of wilderness.

"He has a good heart, God be praised," Gudrun conceded gratefully.

"I like him, the queer man, mamma," Helga mumbled,

her mouth full of prunes. "Oh, look, mamma, this big, soft one; taste it, it's awfully good."

The terrors of the previous hours were somehow for the moment forgotten. While Einar went to gather what few belongings Borga possessed, mother and daughter chattered away with an ease they had long not known. They were full of plans, and full of hope, and filled with faith that the times would soon be brighter, and the blessings of a home be theirs once more. Borga, freed from the paralyzing fear which had been creeping over her, wondered what had become of the young guide, finding room in that overburdened heart of hers for regret that he should have gone without saying goodbye. And then she remembered with a shock that she did not even know his name.

The hour passed all too swiftly and with quickening heartbeats Borga saw the tall form of her new master in the doorway. Her father picked up the pitifully meagre bundle of her belongings and with her mother and Helga clinging to either hand she went toward him and out into the street.

There was a sunset of that indescribable beauty which only the prairies know. It seemed like a crimson curtain against which the stockade and the squat buildings of the Hudson Bay Company stood out solemn and grim. A little farther towards the fork of the rivers, the company's mill shot its smoke into that wondrous sky. There was a wild freedom about the untrammelled prairie beyond, there was romance and loveliness in that wide sweep of sky—they trailed off these two in an ever-widening sweep, like two fair thoughts that leave the mind to tinge with beauty the world that receives them.

Out in the crooked, dusty street was a wagon and its team of oxen. In the wagon box, beside various boxes and barrels, squatting patiently on a pile of straw, and heaped round about with skins, was the farmer's wife, a dark, moonfaced woman bearing plainly the traits of her Indian

blood. Borga looked towards her timidly and was rewarded by a quick gesture of the hand and friendly nod of the head.

She was in need of encouragement just then. The awful moment of leaving all those who were dear to her, of going into a prison of silence and misunderstandings, of entering some life she knew nothing of, was now irrevocably upon her. Only yesterday—only to-day, she had thought herself brave and prepared. Now she was conscious of her tender years, of the fact that never before had she passed even one night from under her father's roof. She was just a little girl again and her mother was ineffably dear.

Gudrun took the trembling girl into her arms. She was strong now—her child needed her. She was a small woman and Borga was almost a head taller than she, but she was a pillar of strength to the terrified girl who clung to her for that one wild moment.

There was a creaking of wheels and the pawing of hoofs behind them, and they realized that their parting must come to an end. Borga mustered up all her courage, and turning a face pitiful in its twisted smile towards her father, kissed him and turned to the child Helga. As if the import of what was taking place now for the first time were entering her little brain, the child with a shrill cry which chilled them all, threw herself upon her sister's breast. Einar, stepping hastily forward, disentangled the little arms that clung like tentacles about her idolized Borga. "Come, my little love, you must not cry. Do you want to make your Borga unhappy?" he coaxed, trying to stem the tide of tears. "Come now, there's the little girl, smile a bit—let your Borga see little sister's pretty face smiling when she goes away."

The Scotchman on the wagon behind them, blew his nose violently, spat into the street and swore roundly by way

of relieving his feelings. For there is one language that all men understand—the universal language of grief.

Once again Gudrun took the girl into her arms. She kissed her wet eyes and cold cheeks. She drew down the brown head that it might pillow on her shoulder. Then with all that beauty of expression which comes so natural to the Iclander and is his precious legacy from a long line of poet forefathers, she broke into impassioned speech.

“Oh, God of the weak and the fatherless, be gracious unto my child. Make Thy light to shine upon her, that her heart may be clean and that no evil may have power over her young soul.”

Swiftly, lest her courage ebb, she thrust the girl away and led her to the wagon. The half breed woman got up stiffly and helped Borga over the wheel. She shook up the straw and made her sit down, then, dropping down beside her she gathered up the furs about them. The wheels ground heavily upon the soil. The wagon moved ponderously and noisily away.

With her eyes fixed hungrily upon the three dear figures standing dejectedly in the dusty street, Borga did not see where a tall, dishevelled young man pushed rudely through the crowd that had gathered outside the immigration sheds. The oxen had just swung into that long, patient stride, into which and out of which no man might move them against their own volition, when she was roused out of that paralyzing numbness which excessive emotion brings by an eager voice calling out lustily in Icelandic.

The farmer's wife comprehending what this must mean to the girl, nudged her husband sharply and called to him to stop. He looked around a little resentfully, dreading further scenes. But when he saw the handsome eager-faced lad running after them, he grinned in relief and winked at his old wife—or the world and things in general.

Borga swept a trembling hand over her hair and across her red eyes. She was lifted out of an agony as bitter as

wormwood and raised unto the hills of joy. She forgot everything, except a feeling of shame that she should be seen so disfigured by the signs of her weakness, by this worker of miraculous joys, who was approaching her with a look of something deeper than interest on his honest young face.

"You thought I had forgotten all about you. Now didn't you?" he teased, seeing the blush that mounted her pale face. "I had to go home. You see I live here with my old aunt, and she would have worried herself sick had I not gone so she might see for herself that I was not drowned or murdered by some wild red man."

"You were good to come at all, I'm sure," she told him, striving for dignity to hide her very apparent and innocent pleasure.

"You don't know me very well, my little river friend. But, let us be honest. I came because I wanted to come. Because I am sorry to see you go out of my life. It's funny," he laughed softly, a laugh which was not an expression of happiness but which might mean many things, "how folks meet only to part again. But say, I must not keep you longer, I see the old fellow is getting restless." He had a parcel under his arm which he then thrust at the astonished girl. "I thought you might like these few papers," he told her, a bit red in the face and very uncomfortable, for kindly natures are sometimes as ashamed of an act of grace as though it were a crime.

She gave him her hand, thanking him gravely in the manner of the conventional courtesy of her country. But her wonderful eyes lighted with pleasure expressed much more to the boy who held her hand in that over-lingering clasp of the infatuated sons of Adam the world over.

He jumped down from the wagonwheel where he had been perched and removing his cap, bid her Godspeed. Then as an afterthought when the wagon was well under way, called

gaily, "Perhaps I'll be taking the road your way sometime. The agent told me where you are going."

Gudrun and Einar, watching this little scene, looked at each other and nodded. A little cloud of dust was gathering behind the wagon. Borga, their beloved, was being rolled away into the shadows. But in the road, standing with the last rays of the sun falling like a benediction upon his tall strong body, a tawny-headed youth was gazing after her.

"So goes the world, my Gudrun," said Einar, patting her on the shoulder in awkward affection. Then taking her and the child by the hand, they turned and re-entered the rude building.

III

The trip by water down to the site chosen for the headquarters of the future settlement, a low swampy place on the shores of Lake Winnipeg and named rather prematurely Gimli—Gimli, the new heaven and the new earth in the faith of the Norsemen, where all was peace and blessing and "where that High One, who is over all will make his home to watch and ward his children"—was of no particular interest or moment, and devoid of excitement or especial significance. Yet Gudrun found it hard to bear, for just as they were all well under way she remembered with horror that the agent had forgotten to tell her where Borga had gone. Einar comforted her as best he could, saying it doubtless would not be long till he would come to Winnipeg again and then he would get the necessary information. It was just one more drop of wormwood for the poor mother's heart.

Gimli looked very little like a New Jerusalem to Einar and Gudrun, when in company with several other families, they sought in vain a dry spot on which to make a temporary home. After wandering hopelessly about the im-

mediate fields and woods, Einar found half hidden in a clump of spruce a deserted hut. That is to say, a frame of logs minus roof or doors, containing three feet of water in place of a floor and innocent of windows.

The nights were getting bitterly cold and the dampness of the land, together with the customary chill which always accompanies a large body of water, helped to accentuate the discomforts of the weather. So, into this shelter of logs Einar thought best to bring his unfortunate family until something better could be built. He piled logs and brushwood together and made of them a sort of raft in the hut upon which he laid the family's supply of bedding, and in this way they slept for three weeks. Their meals, such as they were, they cooked in the open like many another and for the most part spent the time outside until the cold nights drove them into their soggy bed.

A number of small houses just large enough to give sleeping accommodation to a family, had been thrown together as quickly as possible by those less fortunate than Einar. These were replaced as soon as possible by larger log dwellings, in most cases quite comfortable according to the times.

The government furnished each man about to go upon a homestead with an axe, a grindstone and a stove, if he was unable to make these purchases. This was done also for those who were as yet unable to leave Gimli. In addition to this the government stores furnished staples and rations to the people. So that no adult actually died of starvation in the hard year that followed, but a number of children developed strange illnesses and did not survive. The lack of milk may have had much to do with this—it being thought unwise to give the people cattle that first season since it was too late in the year to cut any hay.

Einar had no money so he welcomed the offer of sharing a house that winter with a certain Grimur, who having a little means, was building a fairly large house and had

bought a stove, beds and a few other equally necessary things. He intended to fish that winter for his immediate use and also to salt and prepare a supply for the summer. He planned to go in the spring upon a homestead nearby, get a loan of stock from the government and start farming in real earnest. He wished to employ Einar to do the clearing on his land, to cut the trees and pile them for firewood or for burning during the winter. For this he would keep his family in food and shelter and Einar would in this way escape taking any loan until spring.

Everyone was as hopeful and as cheerful as was possible in the strange surroundings. It was a little difficult for a people used to a diet consisting so much of dairy produce to live on smoked pork, a meat to which they were entirely unaccustomed. To eat this boiled in their oatmeal for soup, or boiled by itself as a change—to have just enough sugar with their black coffee to keep them from forgetting what it looked like, and just enough of the new bread they had learned to make in the strange new stoves to make them long for more—but after all this was only what they had expected and no one considered it overmuch. It was just a bit of experience to be measured against the coming blessings with a shrug and a smile.

One morning shortly after Grimur and Einar had made their winter's plans, Grimur's wife came running over to Gudrun where she was cooking a little porridge in a pail over the fire outside their shelter.

"For God's sake come and look at my little Anna," she greeted her in a wild tone. "She has been so listless and queer ever since we left Quebec. Lately her fever and chills have worried me much, and she has complained so often of a pain in her back. Now you should see her, she is all coming out in sores!"

Gudrun, feeling an evil premonition creeping over her, hurried with her new friend to the house which Grimur had just finished and into which her own family was to

have moved that day. The little girl lying upon the bed was tossing about in a restless fever. Her face had a bloated look and her forehead, face, and little wrists were broken out in peculiar red sores. Gudrun drew back instinctively, but seeing the terror in the mother's face, tried to control her own agitation.

"What do you think it is—you don't think—oh don't say that you believe——" she broke off, not daring to utter the horrible thought that had possession of her.

Gudrun put her arms around the woman. "I am afraid, dear friend, that your thought is correct. God help us, we must do what we can."

Then they stared at one another helplessly. What could there be done? If this were smallpox and the child had contracted it in Quebec—and just enough time for the incubation of the dreaded disease had lapsed to confirm their fear—how many had not been exposed to it? Gudrun thought of the delicate Helga with a cold fear gripping her heart. Then she thought of Borga alone among a strange people and altogether it seemed as if this were more than she could bear.

There was no time for pining. The women decided to care for the sick child and the men they sent to stay at the other hut with little Helga until further developments.

They had not long to wait. Strangely enough, Einar, always so strong, was the next victim. Then Gudrun, taking matters into her own hands sent for Mr. Thom, a Canadian who was the government representative and responsible for the immigrants. He could not himself come to see the child nor Einar but on being told of the illness and the skin eruption, put it off with the gentle admonition that if they were only less dirty this sort of thing would not happen. "It's just a kind of itch from filth," he told them.

There was nothing they could do. Without doctors, without any knowledge of medical hygiene or any adequate

housing or arrangements of any kind for the handling of disease, in a climate different and through inclement weather, the insidious plague crept upon them. Their only help came through an unlearned little man, who nevertheless showed much instinctive medical skill and with his small store of homeopathic concoctions, or perhaps with his sane manner of handling the patient under the strenuous conditions and on the impossible diet, saved many a life.

When the cases became too numerous to put off easily, the overwise Mr. Thom had to admit that it could hardly all be a case of itch—or, perhaps, it was a case of itching conscience on his own part. At any rate a doctor from Winnipeg was summoned and immediately upon seeing the first patient, he dispelled any doubt concerning the disease.

There was a guard stationed about two miles off, running the entire length of the settlement boundary line. Thither food was brought from the town and in turn the sentinels carried this food to an appointed place at a safe distance from the stricken colony, and here such of the settlers as were able came for the supplies and carried them back to their fellow settlers.

For almost a year this state of affairs lasted. In which time many deeds of heroism, of loyalty and of love were performed. Deeds that were enacted quietly, calmly and as a matter of course. Such deeds as are generally forgotten by men, but recorded in the Book of Life as one more incident in the evolution of mankind.

IV

Borga found the long, slow miles between her and her future home more bearable because of the hope, vague perhaps, but warm and sweet which the young man's last words had brought to her. She felt now that though widely separated from her parents, who were going all of sixty miles from the town she also was leaving—and sixty miles

of wilderness might as well have been six hundred for all the difference it would make in her access to them—she was at least not entering a world entirely black since this new friend of hers knew where she would be.

The little bundle which he had thrust into her hands she clasped against her breast as if the unresponsive sheaf of papers were a living source of comfort. And indeed in the lonely days to follow, the magic of its message was all that stood between her and utter isolation.

She was cold and stiff and terribly weary when the fifteen miles of her trip was ended. By the light of the moon she saw as they turned into the clearing leading to the farmhouse, that it was of considerable size, built of large substantial logs. At the rear were several other buildings, for her new master, with the usual persistence and thriftiness peculiar to his race, had done well in this country to which he had come as a boy. Even in the dim light it was discernible that all was neat and orderly. It comforted the girl by somehow putting her in mind of the small, tidy little farms in the Old Country.

There was a great commotion set up as they neared the house. At least half a dozen dogs rushed out of the dark shadows and swarmed about the wagon. The Scot cracked his whip in the air and yelled at them all in friendly command which only increased the noisy demonstration of their affection. The door of the house opened and a short, stocky man came forth. He was the hired man. He took the tired oxen to the barn and she saw no more of him for the time being.

The room she entered with her new employers was long, and in the light of the open hearth cheerful and homelike. Borga felt the tears rush to her eyes on seeing the leaping fire. Not since she had left her father's house had she seen anything like it.

The farmer's wife made her sit down, then hurried away to prepare them some food. But Borga could not eat. She

tried to drink a little of the strange, bitter tea because it was hot, and to nibble at the thick fragrant bread, but somehow found it difficult to swallow.

Her mistress had herself been a lonely little waif working here and there and not always kindly treated. She gave no sign of understanding in her face, but she knew nevertheless something of what Borga felt. With a sign that Borga understood meant for her to follow, she got up from the table and leading the girl into the kitchen showed her to a small room that opened out of it. Here Borga found herself at last alone. There was a small iron cot in the place, a chair and a crude table made of boxes. On the table stood a little lamp. This was, as she later learned, a luxury and a great kindness on the part of the farmer.

She sat a little while in the stillness of the tiny room. Outside her door she heard the humming of a kettle on the queer stove she had seen in the kitchen. Everything was peaceful. The dogs out in the yard had quieted down and the only sound was an occasional sleepy tinkle. She stepped to the window and looked out into the moonlit sky. She looked for the eyes of Thiassi but could not find them. The moon had possession of the heavens and beamed her acknowledgment upon the sleepy earth.

In all this peace and security she felt a mad desire for flight. How could she ever learn the awful-sounding speech of this land! Why must she be sent like some dumb brute into the service of these strangers! Why could she not have found work in the little town where there were at least a few of her own countrymen? She thought she could not bear it. She would bide her time and take the trail back alone.

Then she remembered the guide and his remark that he might pass her way. She thought of the parcel now lying unopened upon her bed. Tense with a new excitement she hunted for matches and found them in a little holder beside the table. She lit the lamp and opened the bundle. There

were several Old Country newspapers as he had said, but there were also two well-worn books around which these papers were wrapped. They were the Passion Psalms of Hallgrimur Peterson, the beloved book of the past generations of God-fearing Icelanders and a somewhat shabby book of the Heimskringla, the Olaf sagas of the illustrious Snorri Sturlasson.

She was so astonished at this generosity that every emotion fled. She sat and stared at the books in her lap foolishly, with the vacant stare of the blind. Then the storm broke. Still clutching the precious books she flung herself upon the bed and wept as she had not dared to weep for many days. She accused herself of every cowardice, of every selfishness. She prayed childishly to be spared the punishment she surely must deserve. Was not kindness undeserved being showered upon her! Had she not seen already that her new employers were kind? Was she not well aware of the relief that this was to her dear parents? Shame, shame, she thought, a great strong girl crying idly because she must work for honest people and all for the good of herself and her own dear ones! What ailed her, she wondered, to be anything but glad at the prospects of learning this new tongue which was a key to all manner of excellent things?

She was like a convert who under exhortation whips himself into a frenzy of self-accusation and accepts the storm of his pent-up self-pity as a sign of repentance and grace. Beneath the load of her self-inflicted shame, she was broken and crushed. And nature, who is merciful unto her foolish children, released in that flood of tears all the pain and unexpressed terrors of Borga's sore young heart.

Her capacity for tears eventually spent itself. She was limp with the relaxation of overstrained nerves, but she was for the moment at peace with the world and herself. With that miraculous rebounding vitality of young minds, she began planning the regeneration of herself. She would

serve her new master with all the devotion of a saint. She would never again give way to such morbid emotions, nor ever again for one moment consider the cowardly alternative of flight. He must find her when he came strong and cheerful—perhaps fluent in the new language, and be made to see that his good will was well directed.

She wiped her hot, wet face on the little black apron she was wearing to save her good homespun dress, and sat up again for another look at her treasures before preparing for sleep. In the fervor of her new resolutions, she decided to read a little in the psalms rather than the romantic sagas. This was not an entirely honest desire, but rather a penance such as the adolescent mind of man considers acceptable to God.

When she opened the book a little slip of paper fell from between the leaves into her lap. She picked it up and instantly forgot all about reading the psalms. Yet it was just a few lines, written in a fine old-fashioned hand:

"Frauken Borga—I have learned your name, you see.
Dear little friend of romance and dreams:—

You will find much in this country hard to endure but all things have a way of ending and making fools of us all. Be brave. Remember how Hermond sang with the arrow in his breast. It is the way of our fathers. Never forget that the stars that shine here are the same you loved in the homeland, nor that the old moon who smiles down at you will be smiling at me also. In such a little world it would be hard to forget you.

BJORN LINDAL."

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THOR

White as a white sail on a dusky sea,
When half the horizon's clouded and half free
Fluttering between the dun wave and the sky
Is hope's last gleam in man's extremity.

—*Lord Byron.*

All day the wind had swept angrily about the little house in the clearing, whistling down the chimney and rattling the panes of the little windows threateningly. Now it was beginning to snow. The white flakes whirled about in furious eddies as if reluctant to descend to the humble earth. The big trees that stood like sentinels around the patch of cleared land rocked their branches drunkenly and murmured ominously among themselves. Altogether it had been a wild day and the coming night promised to be no better.

This storm-beaten house, some sixteen by twenty feet in dimensions with its pole and mud roof and its gloomy log walls, was the hard-earned home of Bjorn Lindal. He had been in the new settlement, which was spreading from the lake front all along the Icelandic river; only about two years.

His neighbors considered him an upright and ambitious man. They said among themselves that they were surprised a man who talked English so well should not stay in Winnipeg, whence he had come, rather than go into the wilderness of this colony. His wife they had considered a bit odd at first—a silent woman, with eyes that were far too disconcerting to please them and with far too fine an opinion of what a backwoodsman's wife should be. They had

whispered of her eccentricities among themselves but had generally been disinterested enough in her presence.

It was not until she had nursed Mrs. Johnson—never called anything but Finna in the manner of the Icelandic who addresses every associate by his Christian name—with efficiency and true neighborliness, that she was accepted as one of them, and allowed goodnaturedly her “queer ideas.”

They learned that she had suffered much. That she had been separated from her parents immediately upon coming to Winnipeg from the Old Country, and that for many months she had had no tidings of them. Then there had come news to the farm where she had worked of an awful epidemic which had broken out among her countrymen at Gimli. For months no further communication had been possible. Then, after nearly two years of weary waiting she had learned that both father and sister had died of the plague. Her mother had been spared but only to enter upon a long trying invalidism the result of hardship and the ravages of smallpox.

The new neighbors of the Lindals grew tender and ashamed of past criticisms when they whispered of how the young Borga, taking her small earnings, had set out on foot in the dead of winter upon the sixty-mile journey to Gimli, that she might spend with her mother the last few months of life remaining to that much-tried soul.

! Over coffee cups, on delightful occasions when the toil-worn women of the neighborhood got together, there was also repeated the joyous gossip of Mrs. Lindal's love affair.

“But a long hard time they had of it, the poor darlings!”

Finna the enthusiast and leading gossip usually commenced.

“Four long years they never met—picture it! And to think that they were still faithful! Not that I wonder Bjorn couldn't forget her,” she would hastily amend, loving Mrs. Lindal dearly. “Nor was it that he put off going to see her. But you see, like a foolish fellow, he went on a hunting trip with some free trader who made glittering

promises of a lot of money to be made; he was gone for over a year, and picture it——! the Trading Post judged his furs all poor. Then he was taken sick with one of these new-fangled fevers they get in this country and when he could go in search of Borga she had already gone to Gimli. It's just like a book the way they finally met! Borga had returned to Winnipeg and had gone to work in St. Boniface after her mother died. Picture yourself," Finna would emphasise her tale, "how it was for the poor girl, twenty rooms to care for and only eight dollars a month and no mother. And maybe what's worse—though I shouldn't say it who's a mother myself—no hope of seeing her young man again. But on Easter the Lord somehow moved the old crank she had worked for to let her go to church in the evening. Mrs. Lindal had so wanted to see the new church on Pacific and Nina—I've heard it's a very fine church—and there they met!

"Oh dear, oh dear—but picture yourself how it must have been. But even then they couldn't get married for five years. Both wanting to start out grand with a stove and a kettle and a mattress and what not."

So had the coming of the Lindals been an event in the life of the colony and no less an experience in the lives of the Lindals.

For the first four years of married life they had lived in Winnipeg and Borga had worked out as long as she could. But after their two little girls were born, Bjorn decided it would be wiser to take a homestead. He had saved a little money and could start in what was then considered a promising way.

But now upon this stormy day, an event old as life, yet ever new, was impending, which was destined to change the current of their lives.

Inside the cabin, at first glance, all seemed peaceful. The big stove, shining and black, gave forth a grateful heat, and a fantastic, fitful light that was reflected in the clean

tins that hung on the opposite wall. There was a long pine table with benches pushed under it standing nearby and a large cupboard, well made and neatly painted. In the far end of the one and only room was a bed, and opposite this a bunk. Between these two stood a chest of drawers and at the foot of the bed a "kofort," an Icelandic trunk. With the exception of a few old odd chairs, there was nothing else in the way of furniture. But on a shelf upon the wall over the chest of drawers was a row of ragged books and a good clock. These were the Lindal treasures.

The two little girls, Elizabeth, a serious, dark-haired child of five with her mother's expressive eyes, and Ninna, a golden cherub of three—who expected and received the adoration of the household and was her father's idol—were beside the fire munching pieces of bread. Their mother sat hunched upon a chair before the bed. She was aware that once again her hour had come. Taut and expectant, she listened to every sound. She shuddered to hear the wind and moved heavily to the stove to replenish its fuel. Again and again she crossed to the window, blew upon the frosted pane and peered out.

What could be keeping him, she wondered. Surely nothing had befallen him. Why, to-night of all nights, was he so late?

At last the grateful sound came—a heavy grinding of wheels and creaking of leather which heralded the approach of Bjorn. He did not come to the house immediately. Borga knew he was unharnessing the oxen to put them under shelter for the night. She told little Elizabeth to go to the door and call her father, but in the howling of the wind the little voice was lost.

Borga sighed and resigned herself to her fate, trying to control her agonized nerves as best she might.

Bjorn entered at last, covered with snow and stiff with the cold. All day he had been cutting firewood at the far end of the homestead. But he forgot his own discomforts

on seeing Borga's face. He pushed the children aside, who had run eagerly to meet him, and crossed quickly to her side.

"You are not well, my dear—— Borga!——You don't think it's that——Oh heaven, what have I been thinking of?" He was so agitated that she grew calm.

"No, no, don't worry, it will all be well," she told him a little breathlessly, "but I'm afraid you'll have to go for Finna."

"Is there nothing I can do before I go?" dreading to leave her yet knowing he must go, he asked as he lit the lamp.

She was seized with pain and could not answer him. She pointed to the stove. He understood and filled it to its capacity. Then flung himself from the house into the storm.

Love lends wings, perhaps, to even the clumsiest of feet, and in an incredibly short time he had made the two mile trip to Finna's house and returned again. Poor Finna, panting and on the verge of exhaustion, stumbled in after him. They were none too soon. Borga lay across the bed, tortured with pain that only women know.

Then began a battle where as much valor was displayed as ever honored a military field. A battle that the pioneering mothers of our country faced again and again, with no hope before them of winning laurels or praise.

Finna, perspiring and full of compassion, did everything which she in her ignorance could do. Bjorn was as a man demented. He paced the floor and pestered poor Finna endlessly. With a mad desire to do something he piled firewood indiscriminately into the raging stove. The little room became a furnace with the heat. At last in desperation, she ordered him out for water. He filled every vessel in the house. Then, beside himself with his wife's suffering, he rushed into the yard and by the light of the lantern started sawing the green logs just dragged home.

The wind had died down somewhat but the snow fell in thick dense clouds about him. Hoping against hope and then maddened with fear, he worked as if life depended upon his useless task. He had never believed that such things really were. His thoughts were scattered by a call from the house. He dropped the saw.

In the glare of the light which the open doorway made, Finna stood as if in a gateway of fire. She was wringing her hands helplessly and crying shrilly: "Bjorn, Bjorn—I am beside myself. Nothing I can do does any good. I have heard that a midwife from Winnipeg is down at Gold Hall with her sister, Loki Fjalsted's Anna, on a visit. She might help us."

She rushed into the house for Bjorn's coat and then ran wildly after him out to the barn where in a fever of haste he was harnessing the sleepy oxen.

"Man, dear," she told him, her big heart sore with pity for him, "let me help you. So—that's better—you mustn't freeze. It wouldn't do Borga much good to have a cripple on her hands as well as a new baby when she's up again."

It was a small crumb of comfort to the affrighted man.

"Here, here, mind you take the whip—I'm not for sparing cattle, God save us, in a time like this."

"Oh Lord, if you ever hear a poor woman like me," she prayed, running blindly through the snow toward the house—
—"give speed to those poor creatures' feet."

Five miles Bjorn had to go on that snow-covered, newly broken trail. *Faith may move mountains, but oxen move only so fast.*

To Borga fighting her agonizing battle, and to the frantic woman waiting beside her, the moments were endless, the hours an eternity. Borga, stupefied with pain, did not hear the returning team, but Finna, with that unnatural keenness which nervousness imparts to the ear, heard the muffled thud of their feet an incredible distance off. She rushed into the storm to meet them. It was impossible

for her to wait quietly the remaining moments till they should reach the house. She must satisfy herself that this was Bjorn and see if the stranger was with him. When the creaking wagon drew up to her, she saw that this was so.

The midwife got out and hurried into the house with only a simple greeting. Finna helped her off with her snow-covered wraps. The woman was half frozen with cold; she held her purple hands a few moments over the hot stove, then hurried to the bed. Borga was moaning pitifully, her strength badly spent. She had no further control over her nerves nor the groans that escaped her. The midwife saw with despair that her patient had long ago reached the stage where the overworked muscles refused to do their appointed task. Borga was no longer a human machine, where mind and nerve and muscle labor harmoniously together. She was just a body wracked with useless pain and was fast slipping into a state of coma, the dearly bought anaesthetic of nature.

She tried every means in her power to revive Borga's strength. She bathed her face and neck and hands in cold water. She gave her a stimulant and frequent sips of water. She applied compresses to try to increase muscular activity, but everything proved futile. Finally she turned to Finna hopelessly and admitted her defeat. Finna shrieked and threw up her hands imploringly. Bjorn, who had been sitting by the stove in a paralysis of fear, could bear no more. He was wild with bounding terror. He paced the cabin like a panther newly caged. All this commotion awakened the little girls who mercifully had been sleeping through this night of horrors; and Ninna, setting up a shrill cry, ran in her fright to her father. But he had become a primitive thing—a creature caught in a net of threatening destruction and driven frantic with his helplessness. He caught the frightened child roughly by the shoulder and shaking her fiercely, flung her aside. Just so in its fury might a captured brute tear at any stray

object within its reach. The tiny Ninna fled back to her bed and crawled, too surprised for tears, into the sheltering quilts.

Bjorn looked after the flying figure, stupidly passing his hand across his brow. He wondered what he had done and if he were suddenly gone mad. A faint groan from the bed, more horrid in its weakness than any other sound, whipped him into fuller consciousness.

He begged the women to do something. He implored fortune—or heaven—or the universe—or any power that be, to show them mercy. Then he cursed the providence which for generations had forsaken his people. He cursed the world in which such things might be and cursed himself for coming to such a wilderness. The two women gazed at him distracted, yet fascinated by his fury. He turned upon them wildly.

"For God's sake don't stand there doing nothing," he shouted. "Must she die like that in this God-forsaken hole? Isn't there ANY way to save her?"

Finna threw her apron over her head and rocked from side to side drearily. The midwife, the calmest person in the room, having been through similar experiences elsewhere, shook her head.

"Not without instruments," she told him reluctantly.

"NOT without instruments——" he repeated this over and over, staring at her as if trying to grasp its meaning.

In its extremity each soul calls upon its God. Those that have denied Him fall down and implore Him. Those that have scoffed at Him are suddenly pious. And those that have been superior to prayer, grow eloquent with *Te Deums*.

Bjorn called now upon the God of his fathers to help him find a way. Someone has said that necessity is the mother of invention. It is at least equally true that agony, that grim companion of death, prompts the means for her own undoing. There flashed through the harried mind of Bjorn a vision of two shining silver instruments. Two long,

bowed bits of cold metal he had once seen in a doctor's case. Two magic bows of deliverance that have within their sharp embrace the power of granting life.

Who can explain the workings of the mind and who dares to say what prompts its wild solutions! All at once Bjorn ran to the cupboard hunting frantically through the various boxes and shelves till he found what he wanted. He faced the midwife with two silver soup spoons. They were old, long of handle and worn to a thinness which allowed of their bending—heirlooms which had been brought to this country by his aunt.

"Look," he said to the astonished women, holding aloft the two improvised forceps.

"Oh dear, oh dear, his mind's leaving him—maybe gone—poor man," Finna whimpered.

But the midwife, having the open mind of a true physician which welcomes any new suggestion, saw at once the possibility, wild though it appeared.

She became at once self-possessed and a General. She ordered Finna to find some jug or jar for boiling water. There were no antiseptics of any kind, but believing no doubt that anything was better than nothing, she threw soda into the water and then plunged the spoons into it. She found a clean apron and put it on. She ordered more water. She made certain of blankets and rags, of scissors and cord, then these simple and doubtless unscientific preparations being made, she scrubbed her hands as best she could and set to work.

They worked like Trojans over the inert Borga, and at last, to their inexpressible joy, they were rewarded by that ever-anxiously awaited sound, a baby's first greeting to the world.

"God save us, if it isn't a boy! Picture yourself what Borga will say," Finna cried, almost in hysterics, then flew to warm the blanket.

Bjorn sank on his knees beside the bed and buried his head in the pillow beside Borge. He was shaking as with ague and wondered mutely how much one might endure and yet live. Finna, with tears streaming down her face, hushed the crying infant against her breast. And beside her patient stood the midwife, on her face that look of exultation which every hard-earned victory brings. On a chair at her side lay the two bent spoons.

Some hours later a very white and very big-eyed Borge whispered to her husband, smiling a wisp of a smile, "He is my little storm child—Let us call him Thor."

CHAPTER II

SMILES IN SPRINGTIME

Gentle Spring in sunshine clad,
Well dost thou thy power display;
For Winter maketh the light heart sad
And thou—thou maketh the sad heart gay.
—C. D'Orleans.

Spring had laid her gentle fingers upon the land and everywhere the late May sunshine had coaxed forth blade and bud and leaf. Everywhere except in those ragged patches of newly cleared land that the farmers were busily turning in readiness for their little crops of potatoes, turnips and oats.

There had not been as much snow that winter as upon other preceding ones and as yet there had not been overmuch of northerly winds. So the settlers of the new colony along the "Fljot" (Icelandic River) were happy and busy and quite certain that they were to escape the customary spring flood, or at least sure that if it came later it would not be so bad.

Finna told Borga many tales of bygone floods one afternoon when she ran over for a bit of gossip and incidentally to bring to the infant Thor a cunning little dough man which she had just made.

"It's baked so hard he'll never eat it—bless his darling heart—but it's time he cut his teeth on something. God bless him! No, Ninna, you can't have it for all your pretty smiles," she told that interested young lady, who had drawn closer to where her little brother sat propped up

in pillows on a quilt upon the floor. "Don't bother with coffee for me, my dear," she told Borga, who nevertheless put the pot on the stove, replying in the somewhat Chinese courtesy of the Iclander, "indeed, it's not a bother. I was just about to make it anyway."

"Well, dear, if that's how it is I'm not for putting my hand against a cup of such coffee as you make. But isn't it a price we pay for the green beans! My Einar was just saying that when he dragged that fish for the merchants at Headland to Winnipeg, he could have got it for ten cents less at the stores there. Picture it! Mrs. Lindal, how it made us feel, and the merchants not letting my Einar buy a thing unless he paid them for the freighting of it. Because, they said, having hired him and his team he had no right to use it for hauling anything but their supplies, dear, dear," she sighed, brushing a wisp of sandy hair from her ruddy face, "but picture it yourself, and me so fond of coffee. And my little Tomi such a child with an appetite, I sometimes wonder what can he do with all that porridge."

"Finna," Borga broke in upon her discourse, "I've a surprise for you. We're going to christen little Thor Sunday week. 'Sjera' (Rev.) Bjarni is to preach at Headland in the morning and has promised Bjorn to come out here afterwards."

"Don't tell me! Oh dear, oh dear, and me too poor to buy my darling a present! But when did Bjorn see the good 'prest'? He hasn't been out this way for a long time."

"It was when Bjorn went to Selkirk to sell his winter's fish and see about getting that new cow of ours. He saw him then and learned when he was to come down here."

"Borga—I'm not suggesting it, mind you—but, it would be nice to have poor Anna here for the christening—you know, Loki's Anna. They say he's bitter cruel to her. Poor creature, and her that ran away from a good home to marry him, who was nothing but a fisherman. I've even heard her father was high in the church—elder or a deacon

or something." She leaned forward to pat the cooing Thor upon the head and then eased her chair closer to the table where Borga had just placed cups, milk and "mola sigur" (lump sugar) and a granite pot steaming with fragrant coffee. "Elizabeth, dear," Borga called to her little daughter who was talking very gravely to a frog she had caught and now held in a tin box in her lap, while Ninna looked on at a little distance, plainly disgusted—"bring mamma the dish of 'lumur' (small pancakes) in the cupboard."

"Not for me, my dear," said Finna, taking an inviting cup from Borga's hand. "I would just as soon only drink 'mola kaffi'—not that I don't know they're good with you such a grand cook.—That's what comes of going out to service, I often tell the women when they say it's a marvel the way Mrs. Lindal bakes—you learn to make food out of anything and almost nothing.

"Well," she ran on, drinking her coffee slowly and with evident relish, "I'm not so bad at it myself as my Einar says. I'm thinking I'll just make a few 'kleiner' (dough-nuts) for the christening myself. It's not right you should be frying in deep fat with Thor on the floor and Ninna maybe dragging him up to the stove to get splattered. But, picture it! a christening without 'kleiner,' and the dear prest so fond of them. Poor man, with a wife who hasn't the time to fry them—God bless her!"

Borga laughed merrily. She was very happy these days and life seemed very good. The long trying weeks of slow recovery after the birth of Thor were all forgotten. She was regaining her strength and all her old vigor. Bjorn had been pretty successful at his fishing, they would soon be able to get more land ready for a larger oat crop, then by selling this to the men who did the teaming for the ambitious merchants at Headland, he would add a little more to the family income and so, little by little, they would get on. And always, like a bright star, burned the hope that some day the railroad would come and with it prosperity.

But, perhaps, above all, her joys increased as little Thor-grew, chubbier and rosier and lovely as only a baby can be. For this was her son. About him from day to day she built her dreams. She had dreamed them once for herself, and she had learned how hard is the road of progress for a woman. She had often felt that had she been a man her opportunity might have been greater, or at least she might have realized more easily some of the ambitions she had had. Why, Bjorn had been able to do much more. It was always so. The world was made for men and only men could get on in it.

So, very often, as she bathed the little fellow of nights, displaying him in all his rosy sweetness to his admiring father, she would hold him aloft—like Hannah offering up the infant Samuel. “Look, Bjorn, how beautiful he is—our little son. He will walk the ways we longed to follow. All that is best in you and me will find expression through him. It will be—it must be. I shall believe that God will make it so.” But they were not always solemn. It is hard to be solemn and face a cooing baby fresh from his bath.

To-day she entertained no somber thoughts. It was warm and bright without and cheerful and calm within. She listened and replied gaily to Finna’s chatter. And Finna had no end of gossip to dispense. Someone possessed a new calf; someone had suffered a fall; another had been wild with toothache. The wolves had killed another chicken and, having dreamed of a dreary funeral, she was sure that someone was about to be married.

“But things are pretty quiet out here now,” she finished, “no one frozen, or lost last winter, nor even a single drowning in the spring. I declare it’s as if we were in a Christian country where people die as they should, calmly and in bed. But picture it! how it was when my dear mother came, settling there to the south near Big Island, flooded out, poor thing, God rest her, every spring. And me—such a sickly girl—afloat almost, in the bed, with the water all over the

place three feet and more. 'It's a wonder, Finna,' she used to say, 'that I raised you at all, water being so unhealthy and you and the rest of us in it all the time—like we were fishes without souls.'

"But if you've a mind to go over some time and ask Anna to the christening—not that I'm suggesting it, you understand—why then I could bring Tomi some day next week and sit with the baby while you go. It would do you good, poor thing, in so much this winter, and it so mild with so little snow. But that's the way it is, we poor women do have a time with our babies and all—specially in teething time. Poor darlings, God bless them.

"Mind now, Borga," she called as she hurried down the path with her quick, jerky, uneven steps, "don't you be baking any 'kleiner'—it's myself that's going to make them, me with so much dripping from the meat last winter and no baby to christen."

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF FEAR

"And each new day a gash is added to her wounds."

—*Shakespeare.*

On the following Tuesday the Lindals decided to make the trip to Goldhill; so immediately after dinner Finna came over bringing her Tomi with her, a rotund, tow-headed little fellow of six, with a dull-looking face and a general appearance of being stuffed.

Borga had intended to go alone with Bjorn, but Ninna set up such a wail at the idea of being left that her mother threw up her hands and thought best to take her.

"Tut, tut," Finna addressed the exasperated Borga, "she'll be all right when you're once gone."

"Don't you want to stay with your Finna? See, Tomi will play store with you, lovey," she coaxed the child.

The owl-eyed Tomi had moved nearer at this, putting out a pudgy little hand toward Ninna, but that golden-haired goddess promptly slapped him, stamped her tiny feet and howled all the more.

Finna pulled her wounded son into a bony embrace, sniffed unusually loud and looked toward the horrified Borga.

"Ninna! You bad girl! How dare you slap Tomi—and his mother so good to you too," her mother demanded shaking her sharply. "Go and kiss little Tomi and say you're sorry."

"I willunt, I willunt! He allus eats my lummas anyway," Ninna wailed in steadily rising crescendo.

"Well, I never! Picture it, Mrs. Lindal!" Finna always called Borga, "Mrs. Lindal," when she was displeased or when she wished to be impressive, "What she'll be some day. But my dear mother, God rest her, used to say the Lord never puts red hair on an angel. It's always a warning—always!"

Borga expressed again her shame in a child so illtempered. She was red in the face and very hot. Like most women who go out seldom, she was finding it a nerve-racking and trying business to get into her best black skirt and cashmere blouse.

She was now in that full bloom of womanhood of which she had given promise in her youth. Now, in her full development she seemed less tall than then, and was an attractive woman no matter what she wore. There was a reserve and a dignity about her which was impressive and her splendid head supported on its lovely column of full white neck, would have made her noticeable anywhere.

As she put the finishing touches to her toilet by pinning at her throat an old brooch which had been her mother's, and her grandmother's before her, she called to the sedate Elizabeth who had been sitting all this while upon the bed beside the sleeping Thor.

"If I've got to take Ninna you might as well go too, darling. Pull your stocking off and your dress, mamma will find others for you."

Ninna, with a wisdom beyond her years, had already done this and sat now in the middle of the floor calmly counting her toes. She smiled like a seraph as her mother came toward her, comb in hand.

"See! Ninna good girl, all my stockies off, mamma!" But her mother wasn't to be beguiled, for Finna was still knitting very fast and in stony silence except for an occasional sniff.

Bjorn came in just then and wondered what was wrong. Borga wore that look of exasperation which only wayward

childhood brings to a mother's face. Bjorn lifted his eyebrows, glanced at the silent Finna and her Tomi, who was grinning happily, feeling his self-importance immensely.

Ninna pouted at her papa. "Ow, ow, it hurts, mamma," as the comb caught in the red-gold curls.

"Not as much as you hurt Tomi, you bad girl," her mother answered, well aware that this was due to the honor of Finna.

"What!" her father asked in badly assumed horror, "did you hurt your little friend?"

Ninna ignored this. She curled her little nose up in the way which always made him laugh and then blithely blew him a kiss.

"Papa, Finna told a lie. She said God never puts red hair on angels and it's red on me."

Bjorn roared. Finna gasped and stopped knitting and then, it being contrary to her jovial nature to nurse a grievance even where her beloved Tomi was concerned, she, too, broke into gales of laughter.

"Well, I never see such a young one! Picture it, what a conceit and her a baby, God save her!"

Ninna, now well pleased with herself, strutted past the gaping Tomi and went outside. "Now stay clean, darling," her mother warned as she hurried to braid Elizabeth's thick, brown hair.

"Mamma," that budding philosopher told her, as she pulled at the long braids, "Ninna's just like my frog. Every time I look at him he puffs up."

"Well, do you hear!" Finna rocked with laughter. "But Borga, it's a sickness out of him she might get and warts maybe. You shouldn't let her play with such a thing!"

Good humor was now once again restored, and in a few moments the family was ready to set off.

"If Thor gets troublesome, there's a bottle of scalded milk ready for him in the cupboard," Borga called to Finna as they drove off.

"Don't you be frettin' about the baby—him that might be my own, so dear he is, God bless him—and Borga, don't forget to look about the Fjalsted's place. It's a sight, I've been told!"

It was quite a holiday for the Lindals to joggle over the rough roads in the fresh spring air. They were all very happy. Bjorn thought of that other time when he had driven to Goldhill, half mad with terror, and a feeling of thankfulness flooded him. He glanced lovingly at his wife's face. She may have understood his thought, at any rate she smiled back at him her rare sweet smile. They had a habit, these two, of smiling one at the other.

When they reached Goldhill, Borga saw that the log house in the well-cleared field was rather larger than the usual homes of her neighbors. It was built high enough to allow for an upper room. There were four cows over in the brush behind the log barn and three young calves were standing stiffly in a pen nearby, their red necks stretched out through the fence.

As they drove up to the barn, which they had to pass before reaching the house, a swarthy complexioned, heavy-set man came out shovel in hand. He spat a volley of tobacco juice, wiped his mouth with a very dirty hand and addressed the visitors:

"How d'you do—both,—what's your business?"

Bjorn put out his hand smiling:

"No business to-day, Mr. Fjalsted. My wife here thought she'd like a bit of a visit with your folks."

"So? Well, you'll find us poor company, but please to go to the house. I'll look after the oxen."

"Not a pleasant man, is he?" Borga whispered to her husband as they walked up the rather muddy lane to the house. They knocked. There was dead silence, but they knew, as one always knows in such cases, that someone was within. Bjorn cleared his throat loudly and knocked again. After a few embarrassing moments, the door began to open

very slowly, very cautiously. Then a thin, white face peered forth. Borga smiled her warmest smile into the black eyes that looked at her.

"Mrs. Fjalsted, I am Borga Lindal. Your sister saved my life last winter." The door flew wide at last.

"Oh, Mrs. Lindal, come in—forgive me—we have few visitors and I am not so well. Sit down, Mrs. Lindal—Mr. Lindal"—motioning them to two old chairs that stood up against the wall, and seating herself upon a bench near by.

Borga saw that Mrs. Fjalsted was a young woman, younger than herself, but that she was old somehow and broken. She was so slender and so fair of skin that she had a look of transparency. She was dressed in an ugly blue wrapper, and above it her white face, with its burning black eyes, were very startling. Borga felt uncomfortable.

"A fine son you had," Anna said by way of conversation.

"That's just it," the Lindals said, both at once, "we want you to come and see him, he's to be christened on Sunday."

Anna Fjalsted lifted a blue-veined hand to her white throat:

"Oh, I couldn't, but it's kind of you to think of me."

"Oh, but you must. There is no way out of it," Borga told her.

Loki came in. The Lindals saw that his wife half-started to her feet, then remembering herself, sat still. But a strange look crept into her eyes, half fear, half loathing.

"Well, old woman," he flung at her, "put the kettle on. I'm a hospitable man though not a friendly one."

Borga and Bjorn made the customary pleas that they had just had coffee before leaving and were in need of no further refreshments. But Anna had fluttered to the stove and was puttering over the fire.

The little girls had been out in the yard and now Elizabeth came in and stealing softly to her mother's side, whispered:

"There's a boy outside, mamma. He lives here, but he don't like to come in."

Loki heard and spat vehemently into the wood box. "M-hm, that's my son. Runs wild and his mother upholds him in it. Oh, it's a lovely crowd here," he told them.

The door opened slowly—it seemed to be a habit with that door—and a little black head peeped in.

"Balder, dear," his mother called, "come in—there's nothing to fear."

"No," his father roared, "come in, dear, your father won't eat you!"

But as the little figure scampered past him, he kicked out a booted foot wickedly and the child fell, striking his head against the table standing in his way.

Anna whirled from the stove and Borga shuddered at the look of hate she cast her husband. There was a red glare in her eye that tokened no good. She ran to the boy where he hunched against the table with his face hidden in a ragged sleeve. After the first sharp cry of pain he had made no sound.

The Lindals were mute with astonishment and Loki, seeing his little joke fall flat, laughed foolishly.

"Well, well; there's no bones broken, I guess. I wasn't expecting the kid to fall that way."

Little Ninna, unseen, had stolen in. She walked quite unaffrighted up to Loki.

"You're a bad, bad man, aren't you?" she asked him.

This amused him. It was a kind of worship he admired.

"Come, pretty one," making a lunge towards her, "sit on my knee and you shall have a mola."

But that was too much. She turned and fled into her father's ready arms.

After a few distressing moments, when the Lindals wished themselves well away, Anna asked them to the table. The coffee was good and the cream rich and golden, but Borga, thinking of the little figure that had stolen like a

shadow into a corner and sat there in a dejected heap on the floor, found it hard to enjoy. Loki sat down just as he was, unwashed and dirty, and drank his coffee noisily. The Lindals saw that Anna drank very little and that she watched her husband in a fascinated horror.

Bjorn tried to save the day by assuming a friendliness he was far from feeling. He urged the invitation upon the Fjalsteds again and Loki, after hearing his wife refuse, accepted heartily.

"We'll be there, don't worry," he told them, "it's not often I can get away from this——" he shrugged and indicated his household.

Borga kissed Anna in the fashion of the country as she took her farewell.

"Dear Mrs. Fjalsted," she said, "try to come. It will do you good and your little boy—wouldn't he like to play with my little girls? Poor child, it must be lonesome for him, all alone."

"I—oh, yes, yes, I didn't think of that—Balder would doubtless like to go. He never gets out anywhere."

And so at last Borga got the promise she had wanted.

"What a terrible man," she said to her husband as they drove off again. "However could she have married him."

"Heaven knows! He may have been handsome after a fashion and she a silly girl full of dreams."

"But we were full of dreams too, Bjorn," she reminded him.

"Oh, well, we're different," he told her calmly in the wise way of husbands. "The darn rascal—to kick the child like that," he added.

Borga forgot all about poor Mrs. Fjalsted when she rushed into her own little house some time later. The fire was burning cheerfully and as there was still a little chill in the evening air, it was very gratifying. The lamp was burning brightly upon the table and little Tomi was drawing pictures on bits of bark beside it. Finna was rocking

herself back and forth with the sleeping Thor in her arms and an empty milk bottle stood on the floor beside her.

"How has he been—my darling?" Borga wanted to know, half disappointed that the baby was not crying and in need of her.

Finna sniffed: "Well, how would he be, do you think? with his Finna, and him sleeping like a saint as you see."

Borga laughed and kissed her ruddy face. "What would I do without you, Finna, dear? It's as I say to Bjorn, my little Thor is a rich baby; he has two mothers."

And all the incense of Araby could not have pleased the simple Finna better!

Then, since it was so late that her husband would doubtless have taken a snack by himself, nothing must do but that she and Tomi should stay for supper.

"Well," Finna remarked quite unperturbed, "the potatoes are cooked and there's a bit of meat boiling. It won't take you long, Borga, to set out a bite. There's eggs in the skillet ready to put on for the children. But how was it at the Fjalsteds? Terrible, I've a mind."

So, the preparation of the almost completed meal progressed, and over the simple, hearty supper Finna heard of the day's visit.

"Well, did you ever! The mean man! It's a wee, thin lad, you're saying he is," she asked referring to Balder. "I shouldn't wonder but some of my Tomi's outgrown things—not that there's much with him such an heavy child and always sliding down things—might be big enough for the poor thing—him with a mother like that, gone half crazy, God pity her! And it would be a good rest to sit and mend a little for the wee man, and me a strong woman with a good husband, God bless him!"

"No, Tomi, you can't eat three eggs! It's a hen you'd get to be, and chirping. It's as I say to my Einar, where would we be—where would we land if we had more children being they all ate like Tomi. Well, then, Mr. Lindal, just a

small slice for him—he's got to get home and that's the truth."

Thus the meal went on. Now the children needed admonishing, and now it was "poor Balder" or "poor Anna," and then more plans for the christening.

The women were just washing the dishes, for Finna would not hear of going home without giving her help, when they heard a wagon outside. It was Einar.

"Well, papa," Finna greeted him, "you do beat all, coming after us, and you so busy with the clearing."

"Why didn't you come for supper?" Borga wanted to know.

"Yah, we had meat and waffles with cream on," Tomi chirped in.

Einar was a short thin little man, with a hook nose, who had nevertheless a very mild expression. He sat down somewhat apologetically.

"Well, I got through kind of early and so I wondered to myself why don't I bring the woman home, her that has such corns, Mrs. Lindal."

"Tish, papa," Finna broke in, "It's much better they are since the wetness left. But you see for yourself how he is—all heart, that man," she told Borga, "and him that sleeps so badly with his rheumatiz."

"Would you have a drop, Einar? I'm sure the pot isn't empty," she asked him.

"I don't mind if I do, seeing I didn't make any myself, it taking so long to light the fire and all."

Einar had milked their two cows, so Finna saw no reason for hurrying home. "We could maybe play a hand of whist when the baby is put to bed, what you think, Einar? It's a holiday anyway, this week with Thor to christen and pants maybe to make for poor Balder."

They all agreed that this was a very good idea. The Iclander loves a holiday. He makes every unusual event an occasion for merrymaking. The children's birthdays

must be celebrated, the coming of summer; Whitsunday and Ashday—all must be remembered. Good Friday is a holy day, and one may not work but one may visit and drink coffee, with dignity and solemnity as though attending a wake. Then there is Easter to rejoice in, and Christmas—but who doesn't know that Christmas is a whole season, thirteen days long, all full of kindness and good cheer. And how the coffee flows! What meats and cakes and pancakes! What skyr and cream! And how the candles burn as once did the Yule log, and how the little children rejoice in their new clothes, for then the Christmas cat can't get them. To be sure it's a grand year if one only has a good memory and a willing spirit.

As Borga bathed little Thor, Finna explained all his excellencies to Einar, the fatness of him and the legs of him; so strong and the back so straight. "Such a hold he has, Einar, just give him your finger, now isn't he the workman for his papa!" Then when the little girls went to bed and Tomi had been put down for a nap on the big bed opposite, the four grownups played cards until it was best to bring the coffee pot out again. And so the day ended.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTENING

And God said: I will make his soul impregnated with fire,
That he may know the distant star but lights his good desire.
—L. G. S.

On Sunday the Lindals were up bright and early. To be sure, the minister would not come till three o'clock or so, but there was much to be done. Borga had to prepare a huge roast and to make pancakes—those paper-thin festal pancakes which look so enticing, rolled up like a miniature jelly-roll; it would take a long time to bake enough for the party. There were fresh white coverlets to be put upon the bed—coverlets which Borga had made out of unbleached cotton and stitched out in pretty patterns the winter before she was married. There were pillowshams to match with two fat, contented looking doves on them; she copied them off the spare-room shams at her mistress's house.

She wanted also to press her wedding blouse, though she wondered if it were wise to wear it since it might get spotted when she had to be busy about serving the people. Elizabeth's hair had to be braided in ten little pigtails and would have to be combed out at the last moment; and Ninna's dress, daintily made from flour sacks, would need a little pressing, it had lain so long in the drawer.

Bjorn was busily shining the shoes—they each had a pair to wear for just such occasions, which proved that he was doing very well. Most of the time the family wore home-made slippers of skins from the animals killed on the farm, for there was no money coming in from any product except fish, and this had to be taken to Selkirk or Winnipeg.

By the time Borga pronounced it satisfactory the little house was shining in cleanliness. The girls sat stiffly on a bench, in their starched ruffles, afraid to move. Tiny Thor kicked happily on the bed, as yet not encumbered by the long christening robe which his mother had made for him out of a soft white dress her mistress had once given her in a fit of generosity. The dress had been too old fashioned for that good Samaritan and too small for Borga, but now at last, it was as bread upon the waters.

Borga flew from cupboard to stove busily. The cups were all washed again. The Laufabraud (fancy cookies) were all ready in dainty mounds upon two plates, the waffles and pancakes lay in fragrant hills in a large pan covered with a cloth. She dived into the tiny cellar and tasted the skyr—the Icelanders' equivalent for ice cream—and found that it was as good as she hoped. There were two large jugs of cream all cool and sweet to serve with the skyr and to be thinned out a little for the coffee. On the stove her meat was simmering in a delicious sauce, and there was also a big pot of milk ready for the chocolate.

At last Borga dressed herself, and very lovely she looked in her creamy old blouse with a tiny touch of lace at her throat and wrists. She tied a huge white apron about her and then, picking up Thor, proceeded to dress him.

This sacred rite was just over when the Johnsons came. Einar was painfully embarrassed by his collar, but Finna was truly marvelous in an enormous bustle and drapes. She had bought the dress at a secondhand store when she had gone to Winnipeg with Einar and was sure some very rich lady, fallen upon hard times, had once owned it. Young Tomi was fatter than ever in his new shirt and pants. His bulging legs were magnificent in red woollen stockings which absolutely eclipsed the calf-hide slippers he wore.

With them had come Grimur Peterson, a new settler from the quarter section west of the Johnsons, and his wife and three children. Finna had on her company manners as well

as her company clothes. She kissed Borga seriously, shook hands with the little girls and hugged the baby carefully lest she rumple his glory. Then sat down sedately beside her husband.

Mrs. Peterson, a round, fat little person with a snub nose and scraggly brown hair, followed this example, making her two little girls and her son do likewise.

They had just begun to be a little human when another wagon drove up with the Fjalsteds. Borga went to the door to meet them. She was surprised at the look of them all. Loki was as clean as water could make him. He was quite decently clad in an old-country suit, patched, it is true, but neatly pressed. The child, Balder, she saw now was very beautiful, too beautiful she thought for a man child. His sensitive face had about it a look of wisdom which was weird and his big eyes, black like his mother's, were full of questionings. It was Anna herself, however, who surprised Borga the most. She got down lightly like a young girl and ran to meet her.

"Oh, how beautiful it is now in the springtime. The birds sing so and the woods are full of color. Mrs. Lindal, I'm so glad you asked us to come."

Borga was delighted. She even smiled a warm smile at Loki. Yet if she had been surprised at her visitor outside, she was more so when she brought her in. Anna Fjalsted was not the bashful farmer's wife. She was gracious, she was full of bright remarks. She had not been many moments in the room before all forgot their holiday clothes and were laughing together. Then it was that Borga remembered that this woman had been reared carefully in a goodly home and that through some freakish idea of romance she had run off with Loki. She understood that, too, now. He had evidently been good to look upon in a splendid animal sort of way. And Anna, endowed with all spiritual graces, had attributed a fitting fineness of mind to his splendid body.

Shortly after the coming of the Fjalsteds, Bjorn drove up. But it was not the Sjera Bjarni who came with him. Borga forgot her manners for the moment. She saw that a young man was with him but she hardly noticed him. "Didn't Sjera Bjarni come to Headland?"

"No, my dear, he has been taken sick. But this is Sjera Hannes Halson who has come in his stead."

It was a disappointment to every one for Sjera Bjarni was beloved of his people, as well he might be, for he had tended them unselfishly through the plague, through extremes of poverty and in every instance had been a rock of hope and a shield for their salvation.

The young minister felt the disappointment and was a little bit taken aback. Mrs. Fjalsted was quick to respond in this emergency, also;—she shone like a star, she talked with him on matters of which he thought none of these simple people knew the existence. Before he knew what had come about she had him telling of his ambitions and his hard trials; and as he grew more boyish and natural, his audience grew more interested and sympathetic.

Then came the great moment. Borga brought Thor to Finna, who was to be godmother and to have the honor of presenting the baby for baptism. She straightened up and her lean frame seemed to swell with importance. She shook out her skirt so that it showed all its fullness and drapes. Then she took the baby into a loving and careful embrace, spread out all his frills, and stepped toward the red-faced young preacher. He had never christened a baby before and now, with these folk all watching so closely, it seemed an appalling venture.

He cleared his throat, opened the Bible, ran wildly through a few pages and closed it again.

"We will now open this service with the usual hymn—" he had forgotten what it was. He seemed able to see nothing but Finna's enormous drapes, and all his opening words were wiped out of his mind. Mrs. Fjalsted suggested the

number and started the singing. She had a beautiful voice, so clear, so true and so altogether pleasing, that the young minister came out of his confusion and offered a remarkably long and dignified prayer when the hymn ended.

While the usual baptismal questions were being put, Finna's face was as solemn and immovable as if it were a mortal sin to wink an eyelash. Her voice took on a hollow timbre when she answered the perspiring minister's question, "Do you promise to renounce the Devil and all his works?"

"I do," she said, jiggling Thor ever so lightly, for he was beginning to wriggle. And as the service reached the point where the baby was blessed with the water and the sign of the cross, his patience ended, and he kicked out his legs and cried lustily.

"Well, did you ever," exclaimed Finna, sitting down heavily, "him that's such a good child. It's as if he didn't like his name, the darling, and it a good name altogether."

The women got up and kissed Borga, wishing her blessing for the little son, and the men shook hands solemnly. Then, this ordeal all over, they became care-free friends. And while Borga hurried about stirring the chocolate into the hot milk, grinding coffee and setting the table, laughter and wit and oldtime sayings followed one another in swift succession.

"Here, darlings," Borga called to the children, giving to each a cookie and one of Finna's excellent doughnuts, "go out and play now till the big people are through, then you shall have a party all by yourselves."

Tomi looked longingly at the table, but his mother shot him a very severe look. Elizabeth smiled at the Peterson girls.

"You can see my frog if you want to," she said. The two of them shook their heads as if a single thread connected them. "Oh, no, we don't like frogs. They're dirty!"

"Oh, my!" Elizabeth was dumfounded.

"I love them," Balder said shyly, "they sing in their stomachs."

Borga had been listening and watching out of the corner of her eye—mother fashion—and strangely enough saw now for the first time that the little lad was lame. Without knowing why she glanced toward Loki and then felt ashamed of herself.

The room was full of the odor of delicious food, and everyone was more than willing to sit down to the groaning table.

"Please to help yourselves," Bjorn said, passing the cream to Mrs. Fjalsted. How they laughed and how they praised the cooking! Borga's skyr was perfection; her pancakes could not be improved upon and Finna grew quite rosy as the men exclaimed over the doughnuts. They were all like children at a picnic. It was good to be thus together and around the hospitable board of a neighbor. They had all suffered, had all learned through dire poverty how blessed is the gift of daily bread. How twice blessed to be able to share it with another. And now the terrors of the first years were over. They were still all poor but they were working for home and children and the betterment of self, and with that adaptability of the Norse nature, were becoming fond and proud of this new land.

"A fine country, so 'tis," Finna said, "so bright and cheery, barring the flies and sloughs. The mosquitoes now, it's no sense in them I see, and such a sharp nip in them. I declare, begging your reverence's pardon, but it doesn't seem as if anyone but the evil one could have made them."

The feast ended and the hungry children filed in. Finna was holding Thor, so Mrs. Peterson helped Borga wash enough cups for the children. After the second spread was over, and the satisfied youngsters were off again at play, their elders sat about gossiping happily. The young minister told them how the little town of Winnipeg was growing, Main Street being now all safe, the mud pits all filled

up and good sidewalks running in all directions. The Icelanders were beginning to leave the flats, though several still lived near the Hudson Bay warehouse Number six. But the ones who were getting on, were mostly to be found on Ross and Logan and Alexander. He said they were getting on very well in the church though there were always some who would change the settled order of things.

They asked him about house rent and wood and the price of all sorts of commodities, if there was much sickness and who had died in the last year, or got married. The minister, getting a little tired of being used as a newspaper, changed the subject.

"You have a lovely voice, Mrs. Fjalsted, wouldn't you sing for us?"

A little of the strange look Borga had marked in her eyes on their first meeting, crept into them at that. She glanced toward Loki, but he was evidently mellowed by the good food and said nothing. Indeed, Borga thought, he seemed rather pleased. His wife laughed softly.

"I sing but little these days—there was a time . . ."

"What a shame," the young man told her, "a voice is such a gracious gift."

"Let us all sing—that is as it should be," she interrupted him. "Come, let us all sing our dear old songs."

So they sang, with her clear sweet voice leading them, the Icелander's "Auld Lang Syne":

"Kvad er svo glatt, sem godra vina fundur?"

(What is more joyous than a friendly meeting?)

And after that, all the other songs so beloved and so singularly typical of their race. Beautifully worded songs where laughter is the sweeter for the tear behind it and with that ever-present strain of piety present in them all. For the Icелander is deeply religious in a care-free, broad sort of way. He has had need of something greater than self to sustain him through the trying centuries.

"But you must sing for us, Mrs. Fjalsted, something that you like." There was no denying them, so she arose to her feet standing still for a moment as if considering the choice. The rays of the setting sun fell upon her through the tiny square of glass. It made an amber aura about her fragile face. Borga's heart went out to her again. She seemed so frail, so little fitted for the hard life of the pioneers. She was dressed in an Icelandic habit, a black, tightly fitting tailored dress with a stiff white bosom much like the dress fronts that men use at formal affairs, and a soft silk bow at the throat. She was also wearing the tiny cap which goes with such a habit, a round cloth cap fitting down upon the head like a jockey's cap, but having a very long silk tassel hanging coquettishly at the side.

In this severe, dark habit the ethereal look of her face was more than ever noticeable and her dark eyes seemed darker still. After her moment's hesitancy, she lifted her head with its heavy yellow hair and sang, as only one who has agonized much could sing, that lovely song written by one of Iceland's many exiled sons:

"Up ivir fjaudlin hau"
(Over the mountains high)

She sang it with longing, with tenderness—there was not a dry eye when she finished. Those who had dear ones in the Old land, thought of them, and Borga saw again the little home by the blue fiord and remembered the brother who slept there with his fathers.

Then Loki made the only kind speech Borga was ever destined to hear him make:

"Ja, there is nothing like an Icelandic song, especially if Anna sings it."

His wife looked at him quickly, suspicion in her eyes; but some long buried better nature had been awakened by the song—he was entirely serious. A flood of color welled

up into her face and she sang them the skylark's song with a lilt of the thrush in her voice.

But this day as all other days came to its end. Mrs. Peterson got up saying they must go home to the milking.

"Oh, yes, but not without another drop of coffee—how impossible!" They had so far to go, four miles, and five for the Fjalsteds. As for the minister, he would have to stay the night. Bjorn would take him back to Headland in the morning.

Borga was tired but radiant as she bade her friends good bye. The children were sorry to leave. They were grimy now and very full. It had been a day of days for them.

"We can't thank you enough, Mrs. Lindal," said Mrs. Peterson, her expressionless face lighting with a smile. "It's been the grandest christening."

"So it has, barring just the children don't get sick. It's a bit of oil I'm thinkin' would be good for Tomi," Finna told her. Then she stepped up to Mrs. Peterson and the two whispered together busily for a minute.

"Mrs. Lindal," Finna stepped forward importantly, "if you'll be so humble as to take them, there's six pullets in the wagon. Mrs. Peterson and I thought they might be better than nothing for a present. It's for the baby, you understand, seein' as we couldn't buy him a spoon, poor darling, we thought eggs would be the next best thing. It's ashamed we are to bring them and that's the truth."

"Why I declare—Finna, Mrs. Peterson! it's too much altogether!"

Then they kissed each other again and the two happy women hurried out. The men had gone already to get the wagons and the children were dashing about the yard in a final wild ecstasy—all but little Balder—he sat on a stump and looked on.

His mother was the last to bid good night. Her whole face was lighted from within.

"Mrs. Lindal, this has been a day of blessedness. My

dear—my dear, if ever you are sore of heart I hope some one may bring you such joy as you have given me.”

“You will come again, Mrs. Fjalsted, often, I hope; it is not so very far when the roads are dry.” But Anna made no promise. She held Borga’s hand in her thin slender hands and looked at her steadily.

“One never knows,” she said, and hurried out.

Borga picked little Thor up when they were all gone and held him close against her hot face.

“Little Thor, little Thor—so shall we be good to others, you and I—you and I.”

CHAPTER V

REFINEMENT SUFFERS

This eve my heart is floating upon tears,
A fallen rose leaf floating on a stream.
In the dim shadow of departed years,
I have been lying with a saddened dream.

—*T. B. Aldrich.*

Anna Fjalsted tried hard to keep from slipping into the old despair of the weeks before the coming of the Lindals. She tried, as she had done for so many years, to ignore the vulgarities of Loki. She tried to remember his kind remark at the christening, and to assure herself that something tender must be hidden down deep in his nature. But it was useless.

Like many another person inheriting a natural antipathy to all crudeness from a long line of refined ancestors, she found it impossible to understand a mental attitude such as his. She was like a flower which has been nursed in soft warm earth, and cannot sink its roots into coarse rocky soil and flourish.

Moreover, never having known jealousy of a state above her own, she could not understand that every time she had winced at some rudeness of his, she had wounded him by making him conscious of her superior breeding. And as the years sped on the gap had widened. She had none of that wisdom which strong natures have, such natures as have raised themselves up by their own efforts, so she crept into a shell of wounded pride and as Loki saw more and more the displeasure in her eyes deepen to disgust, he became increasingly brutal.

He had often enough been ashamed in the earlier years, not understanding either why he delighted to make her cringe with physical fear. He did not know, in his ignorance, that it was the brute in him trying to destroy superior intelligence.

She had left home and had been separated from all her people to marry this once handsome fisherman. As their fortunes had not been favorable in the Old Country, Loki had immigrated to Canada. She had been glad enough to leave the land where her own kindred shunned her. It made little difference whither they went or what became of them.

Loki was a good workman, he was doing as well as any settler, probably a little better. But she never noticed it. And if he, half hopeful of gaining semblance of approval from her, mentioned it, she showed no interest. But it was not until after the birth of Balder that she hated him utterly, and that he took every opportunity available to wound her.

The child had been born with a slightly twisted foot and Anna was beside herself with grief. Loki had come in intending to console her. To him, after all, it had been nothing so very terrible. The child was perfect in every other way and he had felt inclined to like it all the more for its infirmity. But to Anna, with her mad love for perfection and beauty, this was just another proof of the terrible misfortune she had taken upon herself by marrying this man.

She stormed and she wept and ordered him away. Then he, understanding that this would end such tolerance as she had entertained for him, flew into a blind rage, telling her brutally that with all her superior claims she was so degenerate that she could not even mother a normal child. She never forgot this nor forgave him, and with the passing years things grew steadily worse. He hated the little lame boy, or thought he did, and his mother, who had at first

been repelled by his imperfection, developed a fanatical love for him.

The home life had come to this unhappy state when the Lindals made their acquaintance. Then there followed that delightful day of the christening and things for a time had been more bearable. But it was just a little respite before the storm that was to come.

Loki decided one early morning to kill a young calf.

"You will have to come and help me bleed him," he told his wife.

Anna was astonished. In all the years of their married life he had never commanded her to do anything quite so repulsive. She lifted her head high.

"You are joking, I suppose," she said scornfully.

As a matter of fact, Loki did not know why he had made the request. He had been thinking that someone should do it. But now all the sleeping devil in him awoke.

"I am telling you what you are to do."

"Loki, you forgot yourself. I am not a butcher's daughter."

"I know that to my sorrow. But you are a farmer's wife. I've had all of your damn squeamishness that I intend to stand. You've never thanked me for sparing you these things that other women have to do, and now, by heaven, you shall learn to do them."

She was white with anger.

"What could I possibly do? Does it please you to see me suffer?"

"You can hold the pail while I cut his throat," he leered at her. "Then you can make me some of those sausages you shudder so at."

He was enjoying her horror with the same delight that the Spaniard finds in his bullfight; that the Roman found in the slaughter of the gladiators and the "holy" men of the inquisition derived from the persecution of the Jews. There is much of that lust of torture still in every human

being. It finds expression in many guises under the cloak of religion and the law.

"Loki, even you could not be so cruel!"

This appeal added fuel to the fire. Even he! The words cut him deeper than she could have believed. He would have dragged her dead to the hateful task after that. He took her roughly by the shoulder and pushed her outside. He picked up a pail and thrust it into her nerveless fingers, forcing her to go ahead of him to the barn.

She wanted to run as he led the unsuspecting creature out, but she was under that strange hypnotic spell which his brutality always exercised over her. She saw the axe fall. The dull thud sounded through her brain and shook her body.

Then he yelled at her. She obeyed him like some puppet on the stage, and sank on her knees beside the quivering beast.

There was a swift movement of Loki's hand and then a spurt of something hot and red that trickled and shuddered into the pail. A nauseating odor arose from the crimson stream. Anna felt it rising to her face. She lifted one hand swiftly as if to ward it away. And as she did so, the pail tipped and the hand she raised was wet and red.

Then something snapped in her weakened brain. With a cry so piercing that Loki jumped, she dashed the pail aside and fled—straight into the forest. Loki looked after her, swearing horribly. He looked at the pail lying emptied of its horrid contents and had a vision of lost sausages. He thought no more of his wife. She was a fool. He shrugged, laughing at the good joke it had been—Anna at a butchering. Then he set about skinning the calf.

At dinner time he got himself some lunch, threw Balder a piece of bread ungraciously, and went out to the field he was grubbing. At supper time, seeing the house dark, he grew angry and called loudly to Anna as he entered. There was no sound. He went into the room in which they

slept, the bed was still unmade and all was in confusion. He climbed the ladder leading to the upper room, a rough low place, furnished with a little cot on which Balder slept, a few boxes made into a cupboard and seats, and under the window some wild ferns growing cheerily. This room, too, was empty. He felt the first uneasiness; hurried out, calling to Balder.

He called again and again. Then just as he was about to re-enter the house in disgust, a small voice from an empty barrel behind him said:

"Mamma ran into the woods. I saw her. She wo-o-nt co-o-me away," he sobbed.

Loki was taken aback. He was almost gentle with the weeping boy.

"There, there," he said, "stop crying. We'll go for her."

They found her in a clump of silver poplars. She was singing to herself and rocking to and fro. Loki called her but she kept on singing. He went up to her and touched her and still she only sang. He thought she must have been chilled in the damp woods and was delirious. He lifted her to her feet, half dragging her along. She was passive enough and never stopped singing.

As they neared the barn, however, she stiffened, screamed, and tore herself away. Loki, thoroughly frightened now, ran and caught her. She fought him like a tigress, she scratched and bit him. It was all he could do to get her into the house. Little Balder was crying pitifully, but Loki was so terrified he forgot to scold him.

As soon as they entered the house she ran into the bedroom and fled to a far corner. She crouched there glaring at him balefully. Loki entreated her not to be frightened, to calm herself, to go to bed.

"Come, come, you're not well. Lie down and rest. No one will hurt you and—see dear, Balder is here. He can stay with you."

She moaned, lifting her hands to her poor, confused head.

"But it's so red, so red, so warm and red!"

Little Balder stole up to her, touching her knee timidly:

"Mamma, mamma, I love you, and I'm so hungry."

She stared at him quite puzzled: "Such a pretty face! Such a pretty face! Quick, little boy, run away! Run away! It is wet here and red. See! The sky and the grass—all red! All red!" She pushed him away, hiding her face in her arms.

Loki could have screamed in his terror. He was forced to believe that for a time at least, her mind was clouded. He remembered hearing that it is well to humor those so afflicted. He begged and pleaded. He called her endearments he had never before uttered, even in the days of their short-lived love. He talked in more and more gentle accents and eventually saw her body relax its tension. She leaned back against the wall and her face assumed a strange expression, like the face of a statue with a fixed smile. But her eyes were glassy, lighted now and again with red flashes. He watched her helplessly, much in the same way that she had watched him early in the day.

All at once he saw himself as the brute he had been. He remembered this wild-eyed woman when she had been a slip of smiling girlhood. This fragile wife who had trusted herself to his care. What had he done to her?

"Anna, Anna," he cried, dropping on his knees beside her, "tell me you understand what I say! Tell me you hear me when I ask you to forgive me. God help me, I don't know what got into me! Anna, Anna, speak to me! Speak to me, dear!"

"Sh—Do you hear? He is calling me! He is calling me down by the singing river! I must go softly, they might waken!"

He groaned, beside himself, catching her as she arose. He understood. In some strange way, the poor deranged mind had caught his soft pleading. She was going to meet

him as she had done at her father's home down in the gorge where the river cascaded.

She would not be held back. He felt her muscles stiffen and let her go. She went about the room stealthily on tip-toe, until she reached the ladder. Then, with an expression of cunning creeping over her face, she glanced from side to side, and climbed cautiously into the little room above.

Loki threw himself upon the bed. He did not know what course to take. He realized now fully that this woman he had vowed to love and care for had lost her reason through his abuse and her isolation. In that short moment he suffered the remorse of the damned.

Little Balder had fallen asleep, sobbing. So his father for the first time undressed him, patting his wet little face with a great rough hand and stroking his twisted foot tenderly. Then he laid him down upon the bed with care, covering him snugly.

For hours he sat there beside the sleeping child, listening—listening. Sometimes a soft tread above sent the shivers down his spine and again a weird singing would make him shudder. Then there was silence.

Toward morning he fell asleep and dreamed of a blood-red river, and a swan battling against the current.

CHAPTER VI

ILL TIDINGS

What misadventure is so early up,
That calls our person from our morning rest.
—*Shakespeare.*

Borga had just gone down to Finna's one glad June day. Little Thor was kicking happily out in the yard with his sisters and Tomi to watch him, and the two women were busy quilting a patchwork quilt of Finna's, when Mrs. Peterson came running up the path, half dead with exhaustion. She stumbled over the threshold and sank into a chair. Finna and Borga both stared at her in amazement.

"Anna Fjalsted is crazy! God pity her! she gasped out at last.

"What did you say, woman!" Finna shrieked.

"Oh, Mrs. Peterson, are you sure?" Borga asked, turning pale.

"Heaven help us, yes! Too sure! My Grimur went there this day to ask if he and Loki couldn't exchange work in hay time, and he saw her himself peering down from the loft, and singing, singing. Oh, Mrs. Lindal, it was awful the look of her."

"But how did it happen?" her friends demanded.

"Loki wouldn't say. Grimur asked was she sick, and Loki said yes, and pulled him away. 'It's no snooping around my place I'll be having,' he told my man."

"Well, poor thing. It's only what I told my Einar," Finna added, wiping her eyes. "'A slip of a lady like that,

out in a wild place like this, with such a cruel man. It's crazy she'll be getting and that's a fact."

"We must let Sjera Bjarni know," Borga said. "He may be able to get a doctor from Winnipeg. Then there is Balder. Who will mind him now, I wonder."

"Dear, dear, and him such a lame wee lad! And likely with a weakness in him like his mother. It's only a joy it would be could I have him. Him with no more appetite than a canary, I'm sure." Finna blew her nose and set the kettle on the fire.

"We could maybe see to the making of his clothes, barrin' his father won't stop us," Mrs. Peterson put in timidly.

"And it's myself that would tell him, the mean one, 'It's a queer father you are, wantin' your child to run about like a savage. It's better in patches than that,' I'll tell him," Finna slammed the lid of her stove unmercifully. "It's a black soul he has in him, and that's a fact! Picture it, what a meanness she must have stood, poor pretty darling, and with a lame boy, too! It's a sad life some have in this world—God pity them in the next, and that's the truth!"

So the story spread. Loki, reading accusation in all his neighbors' eyes, became more and more a recluse. He worked feverishly. He forbade all visitors to come. But Finna, true to her word, went nevertheless, off and on, taking odd articles of clothing, whatever the struggling settlers could spare, and which she had re-fashioned for Balder. Sometimes she saw him running about the farm. More often she did not. But she always brought especially sweetened cookies for him from Borga and herself as well as other breadstuffs baked by the kindly neighbors, things which they hoped would reach the unhappy woman who spent all her days in that little upper chamber.

Once Finna saw her white face at the window and once heard her singing in a weird, high treble. The settlers whispered also that at night she sometimes crept down out of her prison and went about the woods like a ghost. No one

dared asked Loki about her, how she was cared for or what he planned on doing.

Sjera Bjarni could not come to lend his aid, for he had been so weakened by his illness in the spring, that he had reluctantly accepted a calling in a less strenuous settlement for a term of years.

CHAPTER VII

THE MINSTREL OF THE WOOD

Make me thy priest, O mother,
And prophet of thy mood,
With all the forest wonder
Enraptured and imbued.

—*Bliss Carman.*

About five years had passed since the darkness closed in upon Mrs. Fjalsted. Affairs were very much as they had been in the colony. There were, to be sure, a few more settlers and the roads were a little better and there was also a tiny schoolhouse where a teacher tried in a few weeks out of the year to teach the rudiments of education.

The Lindals had added a little shed to the house and had made the big room into two smaller ones. The jagged clearing had also spread and Bjorn was now raising a little oats which he sold to the merchants at Headland. Borga took great pride in her flock of hens and the cows, now five in number.

The Johnsons had not progressed so fast, because their land was low and generally flooded spring and fall, at which times the entire family would stay with the Lindals until it was possible to be about again in a semi-dry state on their own place. Einar did not see much use in trying to cultivate much of a grain field under such conditions. They depended largely upon their cows for their maintenance and Einar hauled fish in the winter for the Headland outfit, for which he was paid a monthly salary, and in that way could pay the taxes on his land and get such necessities as could not be dispensed with.

It was fall now and the plums were ripe. The children, Elizabeth and Ninna, had agreed to wait for Tomi one early afternoon, then they were to go for a day's outing in the woods.

Borga had just finished packing a pail of lunch when Tomi came in. He was still a stocky lad, with a good-humored stolid face, and he was as much at home at the Lindals as in his own house.

"How many sacks did you bring?" Elizabeth asked.

"Two."

"And how much do you think you'll eat, Tomi?" Ninna demanded, tossing her red curls saucily.

"Not so many more than you, redhead," he told her.

"Now, children," Borga sighed, "don't start quarrelling before you go—and spoil your picnic."

"Oh, we don't mind Ninna," Tomi replied grandiloquently, "do we, Elizabeth?"

"Well, no, not so awfully," she answered gravely, "I guess she can't help it." Then to her mother, "Mamma, the best plums are near Loki's land. Do you think we can go there?"

"If you don't go on his quarter, he can't say anything, child. But remember, if you see him, pass by quietly, don't stare at the poor man and reply politely if he speaks to you."

"All right, we will," they promised in unison, as they filed out.

Little Thor, now nearly six, winked his eyes manfully to keep the tears back. He wanted to go but it was too far for his little legs, his mother told him.

"You'll see, mamma, when my legs is longer, I'll go myself and pick all the plums, so I will," he informed his mother as she watched him struggling with his tears.

"Of course, you will. A great bag full, for papa and mamma. All yourself, darling."

"And we'll sit and feed the stones to the fishes in the fljot (river), won't we, mamma, and then they won't be so

small and hungry with their mouths wide open, will they?" he demanded.

"I don't know, funny boy. Come in with mamma, while she kneads her bread and I'll make you a doughman."

"And will you tell me a story too, if I don't put my hands in the pan even a teentsie, teentsie? A story, mamma, about the king and his long ship."

"Yes, darling. He was a great king and a good—and his name was Olaf Trygvesson. Sit there on the doorstep and I'll tell you something about him and his Long Serpent."

So while her hands moulded deftly the pliant dough into smooth white little rolls, she painted in glowing colors the heroism, the valor and the tragedy of Olaf. For this little son was to walk in the ways of honor and truth and to learn how imperishable is the memory of a great nature.

She knew little of histories save through her sagas. She knew nothing of the mixed motives which sometimes moved the kingly heart. The heroes were all unselfish, filled with a love of justice and honor. And all their deeds were generous and good.

So should he be also, the little son, so dearly bought.

"Bensi and Runa Peterson are going to meet us at the crossroads west of our farm," Tomi told the girls as they hurried across the fields.

"Oh, dear, then there'll be no fun. Runa'll want to boss us all the time," Ninna pouted.

"Not with us boys along, she won't—I can tell you that," Tomi assured her.

"My, but you think you're great. Oh, look there's a robin. Isn't he fat! See, Elizabeth, how he looks, so important just like you," she teased.

Tomi grabbed Elizabeth's hand. "Come on, run. We'll leave her. Maybe she won't be so smart then."

They raced at a good clip. Ninna did her best to follow,

but the odds of age were against her. She had to beg them to wait and to promise to be on her good behaviour.

At the crossroads the Peterson children met them, each with a bag and a pail of dinner. The boys paired off, taking deep delight in out-walking the girls, and then stopping to call to them disgustedly to follow faster.

"Gee, ain't it the dickens dragging girls along," Bensi asked Tomi confidentially, but in a tone which he hoped would carry.

"Oh—Elizabeth ain't so bad, she can run pretty fast and she ain't a-scared of worms neither," he answered, true to his favorite.

"Well, Ninna is a terror, and so is Runa for all she's older," Bensi went on.

"Yah, you bet," Tomi agreed. "Say, I wonder if we'll meet Loki. Ain't he the dickens, though?"

Over the mottled fields and through the many-colored woods, the happy children hurried. It was a wonderful treat for them to go plumming. It was a great yearly adventure. Going berry-picking was very tame and colorless, for there were plenty of berries on their own farms, but the plums were to be found only in a few places and that far from their homes. Then one never could tell but what a black bear might come ambling out of the thickets—bears are very fond of plums. And this lent a delicious thrill to the outing.

The children had just arrived at the first plum grove and the girls had excitedly run forward to get their first taste of the little red fruit, when they all jumped and stared at one another as a strange kind of whistle broke the silence. It was low and soft and long drawn out, like a dying note on a violin.

"Gee Whillikers," Tomi whispered, "maybe it's an Injun trackin' us or somethin'."

"Oh, will he cut off my lovely hair?" Ninna wailed, dis-

regarding the wild signs of her companions to keep silence.

"Oh, gee, we're as good as dead now," Bensi told them.

The whistling began again. It soared and trilled, running through a dozen birds' notes.

"That's not an Indian," Runa said. "It's someone mocking the birds—maybe it's someone lost."

Their legs were none too steady, but they decided nevertheless to go and investigate the strange sound.

"It might be a new kind of animal," Ninna suggested, stroking her curls lovingly.

"Animals don't whistle, you ninny," the boys became sarcastic. "Say, ain't you the wise one?" they jeered.

"Well, it might be a lost one from a circus. Didn't teacher tell us about the funny things in circuses?" she snapped back at them, hating to be laughed at.

As they pressed on cautiously into a heavy clump of trees, the whistling stopped, but another sound, though a familiar one, terrified them almost as much with its suddenness. It was the sharp barking of a dog. And then they discovered the innocent cause of their fright.

Sitting on a stump, his bare legs crossed lazily before him and with a small black dog dancing excitedly about him or stopping short to bristle wickedly at the approaching children, was a slender, black-haired boy, deeply sunburned, very ragged and grinning impishly. They knew at once this must be Balder Fjalsted.

For a long time now, his father had made it so difficult for any neighbor to make however innocent a visit, that the settlers had given up trying to interest themselves in his affairs. The timid little teacher had once thought to go and tell Loki he must send his son to school, but her courage ebbed away when she met the fierce farmer and she had never said anything about it. Each household was busy enough with its own problems, and so the conduct of Loki became more or less accepted as the inevitable. He was a riddle and all his household queer.

The children had never met Balder since his mother's madness. They had all been too young, at first, to understand what all the talk about her had meant, and by the time they did comprehend, the little lame boy had ceased to be a personality to them.

Now they stood and stared at him as if he were of a species different from their own. Then Elizabeth, whose little heart was filled with kindness toward all outcasts and stray things, felt irresistibly drawn toward this ragged dark-eyed boy.

"Come and have dinner with us. We got lots of stuff," she invited him timidly.

His face flushed hotly. "If you'd like me to," he answered, "but I ain't hungry."

"Say, you're Balder Fjalsted, ain't you?" Tomi asked.

"Yah, that's me."

"Ah, gee, ain't that tough. Was you doin' all that there pretty whistlin'?" he wanted to know.

"I kind of like to mock the birds," Balder said, "there's a heap of things they say."

"Gosh, you're a rum one! But you sure scared us, didn't he, kids? We thought maybe you was an injun or some-thin'. Let's eat our stuff before we start pickin'," Tomi suggested to the girls, who had carried all the lunch, such work not being befitting to growing manhood.

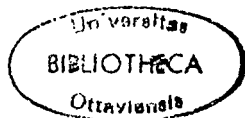
"Well, maybe we best. Then we can fill the pails too," they agreed.

They spread the clean flour sacks on the ground and set out the cheese sandwiches, the cookies and doughnuts. Runa had brought a package of raisins over which the children exclaimed in great delight.

"Ah, gimme one," Tomi shouted.

"No, you don't! Just you wait till we eat our bread."

"Come on, sit down," they told Balder. "What's your dog's name?"



"Spot. Cause his tail has a white tip. He's a good dog, ain't you, Spot?" Spot wagged decided acquiescence.

With that abruptness and cruelty of thoughtless childhood, Ninna studied Balder disapprovingly and then asked, "Your mamma's crazy, ain't she?"

The boy paled. "Don't you dare say that about her. She just can't remember things, that's all, and she sings like an angel." His eyes were wet and defiant.

"Ninna, shut up!" Tomi and Bensi roared in unison, whereat she burst into tears.

"You're always scolding me, all of you! I hate you! I hate you! So I do!" She threw herself flat upon the grass.

"Oh, gosh," Balder broke out, already a slave to this pretty bit of femininity, "she's just a kid, let her alone."

After the lunch was ravenously finished, even Spot had decided to accept these new beings into his favor. He tore about joyously as they went about from place to place filling their sacks or battling with plum stones. He nipped the girls in the legs by way of showing his good opinion, barking excitedly at the delightful shrieks they uttered.

Balder knew all the best plum hovers. The woods were his habitat and he knew them like a book. Bensi and Tomi were impressed with his wisdom.

"Say, you ought to come to school," they told him, "it'll be startin' soon now. We got a great teacher, really, and beside, you'll meet some of the other kids."

Balder had enjoyed the rare treat of being with his own kind. At this remark his sensitive face clouded.

"Pa thinks it's best for us to be by ourselves. He's furrible firm, is pa."

"But you'll have to go sometime," Runa said, who, being the oldest, wished at all times to impress this upon her playmates.

"Pa says no one kin make me," he answered.

"They can so, Balder. The govermint will send you to

jail if you don't," she told him solemnly, not knowing what kind of ogre the "govermint" was, nor being very clear on what a jail consisted of either.

"Now, don't you mind Runa," Elizabeth interrupted. "Just come home with us and mamma'll tell you what's best to do."

"Oh, I couldn't, could I?" Balder stammered, longing above all to do so. These children were all so merry, so full of life, it must be wonderful at their homes, he thought.

"Sure's you live! Come on!" Tomi seconded the invitation. "Mrs. Lindal's that good, you never saw none to beat her, lest it's my ma," he added loyally.

"If you're sure it's all right, maybe I will for a spell. Pa mostly lets me run about like I want to. He needn't know I went."

So it came about that Balder once again came to the Lindals, finding a welcome which he was never to forego.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BELOVED VAGABOND

Oh, well for him who breaks his dream
With the blow that ends the strife;
And, waking, knows the peace that flows
Around the pain of life!

A few days after the children had brought Balder home with them from the woods, Mrs. Lindal was out in the yard beating her pillows and heavy winter quilts. The girls had gone with their father on some errand to a neighbor and little Thor was playing at fishing down by the fjot which crossed the farm below the knoll on which the house stood. She was deep in thought, swinging from the problem of the children's winter clothes and shoes—yes, they would all have to have new shoes, she couldn't have them going to school in thin, homemade slippers through snow in frosty weather with three miles to walk—and then to the riddle of how to get Balder to school and into association with other folk. She was thinking how much the child must have learned of the bitter side of life, and how little of its joys. Her eyes grew moist recalling the wistfulness of his face as he had left that night after his visit. These musings absorbed her so much that she was quite taken aback to hear a voice calling.

"So—you take it out of the pillows, eh, my daughter?"

She couldn't believe her eyes. It was Sjera Bjarni. She ran to him quickly, taking his hands.

"Oh, Sjera Bjarni, can it really be you?"

He laughed, gripping her hands tightly.

"I don't much resemble a spirit now, I wager. Ten pounds I've gained since leaving—ten pounds of flesh, my dear, in payment for my dear people. An Esau's mess of pottage, I'm thinking."

They were walking arm in arm now toward the house. Borga studied the kind old face. It was not much changed. There was, in spite of the supposed improvement in health, a look of weariness about the man. He stooped a little, for he carried a pack on his back, having walked, according to his custom when on these personal visits to his people, all the way from Headland. His grey eyes were deep set beneath his broad, high forehead, the nose straight and prominent. The lower part of his face was hidden in a soft brown beard which became him admirably. To see the face in repose one might have thought it sad, perhaps, and a little stern, but the wrinkles about the eyes gave evidence of frequent laughter. He was not a large man. He had never been over strong in body but had proved by prodigious work and ceaseless study that the mind is superior to the flesh and will accomplish that to which it aspires. It is the proof perhaps of the germ of immortality within man—an atom of that Power which commands and is obeyed and whose words may not return again void.

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming? Bjorn could have gone for you to Headland."

"And so robbed me of seeing the ready welcome in my children's eyes," he answered. "No, no, the walk through the fragrant autumn woods was no penalty, and a little fatigue is nothing when one is spoiled at every turn as I am."

They were in the house by this time and Borga had relieved him of his pack and seated him in the most comfortable chair. She flew to the stove.

"No coffee for me now, daughter. You recall the little weakness, I see, but I have been nearly drowned in the joyous juice this afternoon. First at Mrs. Peterson's—a

new settler, I guess, and then at our kind Finna's. So like her mother, she is. I notice it more and more as she grows older."

Borga sobered at that. It was not the least reason for her love of this minister that he had been her mother's guide and comfort all through the terrible months after the death of Einar and Helga, and that it had been on his kind breast that she herself had sobbed out her grief when that dear mother had breathed her last.

Their eyes met. He smiled.

"The sun has a way of setting, but it rises again. And, as our poet said, the rose we gather fades, but others bloom breathing a fragrance quite as sweet. Life is like that, my dear. Too much sunshine kills vegetation. Laughter without tears, hardens the soul."

"But, I have not your wisdom, Sjera Bjarni, and sometimes I can't help thinking how unjustified was all my mother's suffering. A life just thrown away, it seems—all that sorrow for what, I wonder?" Borga's voice was edged with the sharpness of her anger at a Providence so cruel.

He looked at her patiently—a little puzzled, perhaps, that love and motherhood and the years had as yet taught her so little.

"Those who live close to nature know that there is no waste in the universe though much appears so. All growth is painful, all progress fraught with distress."

She smiled ruefully. "It's as I said. You are too wise for me. I'm just an ignorant country woman. I still can't see what you would have me see."

"No. Well, let us then forget it. There is a quality, much prattled of and much abused, but it has been wisely said that to possess this quality will give us freedom. For truth possessed makes terror fade away. A chain is made one link at a time. No process of growth can be hurried. If you could see that your mother by her suffering had gained one step toward a great ideal, you would not be

resentful. But it is this stubbornness on our part which causes grief. We are still like sheep that must be whipped into the path we are to take. But, this is heavy conversation before an evening meal. Tell me rather of yourself and where is the little son whom I was not favored to christen?"

"Why, I declare! For the first time in his little life, I've forgotten him," she laughed, running to the door and calling Thor.

In a few moments he came in obediently, holding his pole and string in one hand and several pieces of bark tied together in the other.

"See, mamma," he said, holding them up, "all these fishes what I ketched? I'm goin' to sell them and buy a boat."

"Ho, ho," Sjera Bjarni laughed, "and what would you do with the boat, little man?"

Thor surveyed him in silence. Then, evidently well pleased with the visitor, grinned broadly.

"I'd sail, an' sail, an' sail, all the way to the place where the sun sets."

His mother glanced proudly toward the minister and he nodded appreciatively.

"But why to the sunset and not the sunrise?" he asked seriously.

"Because," Thor answered without hesitation, "I don't know what's on the other side of the world."

Sjera Bjarni held out his hand to the little boy.

"So," he said, drawing him close, "you have the old Viking spirit, the longing for uncharted seas. Well, well, we have outgrown our dragon ships—our desires are too swift for them, but we have built us other boats—we call them Intelligence, and in them we still go buccaneering—and in them we sail at last toward the setting sun."

Thor was deeply impressed. Like most children he loved the sound of strange words, they gave him a feeling of

sharing some mystery and awakened all sorts of questions and ideas in his little head.

Borga left them together and hurried out to the storehouse that Bjorn had built that spring to get some meat and vegetables for supper. She was preparing these for cooking when her husband and the girls came in.

He was no less surprised than she had been at their visitor and no less delighted. There were a thousand things to talk of. Was he going to take up the charge again and when would Fru Haldora be able to come down? The minister told them that he was not only back among them, but back to take them into his keeping for a time at least, and that this wife intended to come down for the Christmas work. "But as you know," he added, "she is generally busy teaching this one and that one—to sing or to play, if they can get an instrument, or perhaps a bit of history and literature to those who could not get these branches before."

"That reminds me," Bjorn said, "we have a sad case here. Do you remember the Fjalsteds? They came a year or so before you left us."

"Yes, yes, a grim man and a very sweet woman."

"Just so, Sjera Bjarni. We don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden Mrs. Fjalsted lost her mind. It was five years or more ago. She seems to be quite harmless, at least one hears nothing to the contrary. But her husband has shut himself away from all of us. No one knows how they got on, those first years, with her like that and a young child of six. He never went out working in the winter and as you know one gets little for the small amount of grain we can raise. Since the boy has grown older, Fjalsted now goes in winter to fish up north for the merchants, but this leaves the child—about eleven I guess he is—isn't he, mamma?—to care for his mother and the farm. We have often wished that you were here, thinking you might be able to get something done for the poor woman, or get the child

away from such a place. He hasn't even been to school yet."

The old man shook his head sadly. "We shall see, we shall see. Surely I will go and talk to this man. It sounds like mild insanity—nervous derangement or melancholia—very likely curable, unless her surroundings have been too adverse. The boy must, of course, be sent to school. I shall make it a point to go there to-morrow, though I had intended pressing onward. You will have to put me up another night, that is all."

"How you talk," Borga chided him merrily, "knowing well what an honor you do us."

He passed this off with a wave of the hand. "And how are things going with you Bjorn?"

"Not too badly, but it is very slow. There's no hope yet of a railroad and until it comes we can't gain anything through either grain or stock. And it's a crime the way we have to burn our timber when it might be shipped and sold for fuel."

"Yes, it is a hard riddle to solve, this settling of a country. There are better districts, my son, I cannot but say that—but again, someone must have patience and endurance to conquer the difficulties. Some day these low, marshy lands hereabout will be dry and lend themselves to cultivation, and some day the railroad will have to come. Perseverance and toil will compel it to come."

Bjorn nodded soberly, then he said, "When I remember the wild plans I had in youth of gaining recognition and position after a few years in this country, it seems a huge joke. You know the attitude that the people had towards us. Suspicion, distrust and contempt. A little of that faded when we proved our worth in the rebellion—it has never been said or ever will, I hope, that a Norseman can't defend his home. But we Icelanders are still a curiosity to many. They think us creatures of doubtful habit and uncertain intelligence. They tolerate us because we are useful—because

we are doing what they refuse to do, being of such superior clay."

"You are bitter, my son. Perhaps with reason. But you are not quite just. You may remember that Rolf Ganger was not warmly welcomed in Normandy. He, too, was tolerated for the protection he lent certain weaker factions and because of the terror he inspired in others. Yet the Fifth Duke of Normandy went to England with power and glory. Neither was he welcomed there, yet he has left through his Norman followers a noble legacy to England, and England now is grateful for her Norman blood. Let us not despair then of our little trials. Let us be worthy of our own birthright and some day the good we do will find recognition. But more than this, remember, that we must expect to pay for the right to claim a part in this country."

Bjorn laughed a little coldly. "Sjera Bjarni, I have learned that much at least—we pay and pay dearly for all we get here."

The old man sighed. He thought how much these two had yet to learn—"I wonder—I wonder. . . ."

Then he switched the current of thought to other less grave matters. And then knowing well the human heart, began telling them of certain new immigrants who had come to Winnipeg in the spring and what their problems and difficulties were. This he knew would gain their sympathy and turn their minds away from their own difficulties.

He told them how the immigrants, who were now drifting into the country in small groups or individually, were given no support such as the first of their countrymen had received.

"There is, of course, a labor bureau, but for the most part these people hunt their own occupations for themselves aided by the Icelanders already settled here. And it is gratifying to know," he went on, "that somehow they

manage to sustain themselves however hard the times are and as yet have not appealed for any aid from the government.

"There is much suffering, nevertheless, which only those of our race know of. Sickness, owing to poor living conditions—miserable houses, food and insufficient clothing. In many cases both the father and mother of a family are compelled to go out working in order to keep their children and themselves from being a charge on the country. But in spite of this it is often very difficult for these families to get even enough food and fuel for the wages are so pitifully small.

"There is a sad case particularly which met my attention when I came back to Winnipeg from my sojourn in Dakota. A family by the name of Hafstein came about two years ago. The man was not very strong, but having been a harnessmaker in the old country, he found work at Harstone's harness shop where he practically killed himself trying to earn enough money to keep his family and to pay back his passage money."

"He died, then?" Borga exclaimed, all sympathy toward these others who were battling against a similar adverse fortune as that of her own parents.

"Yes, he sickened after a few months. You may never have seen the wretched place where this man worked, Bjorn—an insufferable hole, cold and unsanitary—was once an old skating rink, I believe. No one with a delicate constitution could have endured the work and worry this man had to face. Mrs. Hafstein told me that thirty cents was all that Harstone paid for the sewing of an entire trace, which as you know is six feet long and has all to be double-stitched with double wax thread. However fast a man worked he could not hope to make more than seventy-five cents a day. Mr. Hafstein toiled day after day from six in the morning until ten and eleven at night trying to make his dollar a day. You can imagine how this would be. As is always

the case among the poor in a town or city, their food is inferior to that which men can more readily get in the country. With a bit of dry bread and black coffee to dull the edge of hunger at mid-day and nothing more until almost midnight, you may understand how easily a frail body would succumb.

"This family had taken a shack down in the neighborhood known as Number Six, because it was cheap at four dollars a month. But when you come to reckon that the income was usually an average of eighteen dollars a month and that six or eight dollars of this had to go for fuel in the winter time, it left them only six dollars a month to sustain life and respectability on after the rent was paid."

"Well," Bjorn blurted out, "doesn't that prove my point? Aren't we being used for others to fatten themselves on? That man Harstone, for instance, he is likely well pleased with his clever wage system. To him his workmen are as so much cattle to be slaughtered if he sees fit or allowed to live if it helps to swell his pocketbook."

"That is true enough, Bjorn, but we must be patient. Such men are, when rightly seen, an ugly fester on the land and not Canada's ideal. This is a young country—it is for all her citizens to decide whether they shall allow that type of man to domineer or not. Indirectly such self-centered ambition does us a service. It causes so much misery that it will at last arouse enough animosity to destroy itself."

Bjorn laughed sarcastically. "No, Sjera Bjarni, not in our time I'm afraid will we see justice in such matters. There are too many of us who are driven by hunger to bend our backs to these men. It has destroyed what little religion I did have seeing how entirely a man must be ruled by his stomach."

Sjera Bjarni's face took on a sadder look. "Perhaps you are right, my son. But it is little benefit to despair of the outcome. It is for us to struggle, to bear all the hard-

ships as best we can in order that our children may have it easier than we. There is but one hope, one liberator for the poor. It is education. It has been assumed throughout the ages that the great mass of peoples were born brainless simply because they have never been allowed the leisure to exercise or develop their mental powers. Yet in the face of this is it not singular how little has been accomplished in the way of excellence by the more favored of mankind? But, we in our little country never reached that level of utter ignorance. We were so small and insignificant a country that the ambitious world left us more or less alone—to read our sagas or to suffer and to die. We might be burned in eruptions, shot into the sea by glacial slides or sold into slavery by pirates for all the rest of the world cared! And hard as all that seems, it was nevertheless a great good fortune. We were free to think, free to write and sing of these distresses. We have not degenerated, therefore, into human brutes fawning on a rich man's table. We are still free men as were our unbending Norse ancestors."

"Quite so," Bjorn agreed, "but, what will become of us here? Are we not already slaves spending every moment in a mad effort to get our daily bread?"

"No! A few of us are bound to lose out in this new battle, but the greater part will succeed. This will be because of the children and because of that indestructibility of Norse character. Of all peoples we are perhaps the most readily assimilated. We have in all ages quickly taken on the ways and speech of whatever land we migrated to, but the traits of Norse blood are as strong to-day as ever. In Brittany, in Normandy, are the fair descendants of the old Vikings. I have read that the singular beauty of the Breton women—a beauty of form rather than face, is the unmistakable proof of their Norse blood. In England the Norman characteristic is still unsubmerged. So will it be with us here. Our children will be Canadians but our Norse nature will remain unchanged."

"Sjera Bjarni, I wonder if you know how hard it is to make the average Canadian believe that we are not some wild northern savages? One reason I went farming was the insufferable attitude of some of the men I-worked with."

"Yes, I think I do. But did it not occur to you that such men must have been very ignorant themselves. What shall we say of the education of an Englishman who does not know who his next neighbor in the North Sea is? What does he know of his own history if he is not aware how closely we are knit in ties of blood? How much more fit is he, do you think, in a battle of wits against us if he does not know that in fighting us he is fighting the same qualities which made England great?"

"Oh, I'm not really disheartened," Bjorn said. "I intend to hang on with all my teeth, and little Thor will have an education if we all have to go slaving together."

The old man laughed. "See, what did I say? It is so with all of us."

Borga had been sitting by silently while this argument went on. She knew full well how all her race loves an argument and that this was really a deep delight as well as a great relief to her husband and the minister. But she wanted to hear the end of the tale Sjera Bjarni had begun telling them.

"You two forgot what you were talking about," she told them when they fell silent. "You did not tell us what Mr. Hafstein's widow was doing since his death."

"Dear me, how I do digress! To be sure it's a struggle she had the first year. There was a year-old baby then, so she had to knit, to take in washing and scrub offices at night, and in that way she eked out a living and tried to pay something toward her husband's doctor bill and funeral. But now, she told me, things were much better. The baby is a little past two, and the other girl nearly five, so she leaves the two of them at home and goes out by the day. She

works five days out of the week, doing her sewing and baking and other necessary work on the two remaining days. She told me that it is her one desire to try to save a little so that when the older girl gets through the common school she can learn something which will bring in more money. 'Then,' she said, 'we—my older girl and I—can make a school teacher, maybe, out of baby.' There, my dear children, in that spirit you have the promise of our people's ultimate success. That poor widow with only her two hands and a colossal faith, lives only that her two girls may become better than herself."

"If I only could send her a little butter and cheese for Christmas," Borga said, "it would give me such pleasure and maybe not come amiss for her."

"Well, we shall see about that when the holidays arrive," Sjera Bjarni answered. "It would be a treat, that I know. I don't suppose her little girl has ever tasted butter. A bit of dripping is generally all these people can afford. Butter, even at fifteen and twenty cents a pound is a luxury to them, for the absolute necessities are not so cheap, as you know—eight pounds for the dollar of green coffee and about two dollars and a half for a hundred weight of flour. Even with the five dollars a week which she proudly assures me she earns, there is little leeway for delicacies, especially when there are debts to be met owing to so much sickness."

The evening wore away more quickly than they would have wished, for there was so much that the Lindals wanted to hear about.

"It seems lucky after all that I cannot leave to-morrow," the old man told them merrily, as he went to the bed which had been improvised for him. "I should never get to bed otherwise, with all these questions still unanswered."

"But it's a shame, so it is, Sjera Bjarni," they told him as in a single breath, "that you should not accept our bed instead of taking that cot."

"Away with you! Away with you! It's an old woman you would like me to be and not a minister of the stern gospel, that I can see. Mind now, daughter; that you don't let me sleep beyond seven o'clock. I must see this man Loki and his young son."

CHAPTER IX

A MESSENGER OF HOPE

We travelled empty handed
With hearts all fear above,
For we ate the bread of friendship,
We drank the wine of love.

—*Bliss Carman.*

Immediately after breakfast Sjera Bjarni set off toward Goldhill. Bjorn made him take the oxen, declaring he had no need of them that day, and that therefore the minister might save himself the fatigue of walking the five miles to and from Mr. Fjalsted's place.

The old minister pondered over many things as he jogged along. His heart ached for the sufferings and poverty of his people. He felt the weight of his fifty odd years when he considered how much was yet to be done before his countrymen should be spiritually at peace in this new land of their choosing. And how long the battle would doubtless be until their Canadian brethren should see how justly they might claim a part in the glory and the power of this growing country.

"If I were a poet," the old man mused aloud; as he leaned out of the wagon to brush with his whip a fly from the right ear of the ox, "I'd say, how blessed are the feet of them that go before! Yes surely," he sighed, "it is a great task and a noble one, this blazing a road to prosperity—this making a wide path for other feet to follow."

When he turned in at the quarter which he knew from his directions must be that of Loki Fjalsted's, he decided to

tie the team in a small open field, half hidden from the road. He took a bag of hay, which he had thought to bring, out of the wagon and threw it to the oxen. Then went on slowly toward the farm.

He had, perhaps, a quarter of a mile to go before he reached the farm buildings. He passed two large hay sloughs and a considerable field which he thought must have been sown in oats. The crop had been cut and removed. He saw several head of stock near the barn, a dilapidated looking affair with a straw roof leaning all awry, and, strewn about untidily, a number of farm implements—a rusted handplow, a scythe, two shovels, a pitch fork with a twice mended handle and a wagon wheel evidently about to be repaired. He noted these things as he glanced around in search of the farmer.

Just as he was about to proceed to the house, he caught the sound of whistling. It was not like any whistle he had ever heard before. There was in it a flute-like quality, a sweet soaring ecstasy which surprised while it delighted him.

"So," the old man thought to himself, being a confirmed philosopher, "it is a case of my thinking can any good thing come out of Sardis—and here I believe I am about to discover genius or at least extraordinary talent."

He stepped hastily into the shelter of a small group of poplars standing midway between the house and the barn, for he had seen a strange little being come running out of the house. It was the boy Balder, dressed in a huge apron which hung in tatters about his feet. His arms were full of dirty clothes which he dumped indiscriminately into a tub of steaming water standing on a long bench against the wall of the house. Sjera Bjarni felt his ever-ready sympathy well up anew toward the young boy. It seemed typical of the child's life—the ragged apron, the untidy yard and the task before him.

But Balder was evidently in good spirits. He whistled

louder than ever now and the listening man wondered anew at the variety of sounds which the lad produced. And as he whistled he rubbed with reckless energy at the washing. Sjera Bjarni saw the soap suds dashing in all directions as the boy plunged his thin arms in and out of the tub.

All at once the man understood this haste and also the loudness of the whistling. A shrill voice half fretting, half fearful, called repeatedly:

"Little boy, little boy, little boy!"

Balder left the tub, wiped his hands on the apron and hurried inside. There was silence for a while, then a woman's laughter drifted out upon the air. And then a song, soft and sweet, but throbbing with such pathos that the minister felt the hot tears sting his eyes.

He hurried up to the house and, since the door was open, could not but overhear a part of the strange conversation being carried on within.

"That was awful pretty, Dearest, much prettier than the last," the young boy said.

"Of course. That was the song of the thrush with a broken heart. Poor thrush, poor thrush! She never found again the singing river." There was a sound of muffled sobs.

"Now, Dearest, don't cry. She'll find it yet, don't worry. Listen what the blackbird told me." Balder whistled the gayest sounds at his command. "That's what he said, Dearest. It says: Sure the thrush will find the river. It's the song of the river calling her."

His mother clapped her hands. "Oh, yes, I remember now! It is all over, the sadness. It is summer and last night the fairies made a wishing ring in the wood. Bend down, little boy, and I'll tell you something. I saw them and I made a wish. I made a wish that my song would turn to a bird and fly round the world. And the cruel people with the red faces and the rough hands would hear it and drown in their tears."

"Sure, Dearest, your wish will come true. You're a queen now—don't you remember? And all you wish will have to come true."

Sjera Bjarni had, impelled by curiosity he could not evade, moved toward the door of the inner room whence this talk issued. There, perched midway on the ladder leading down from the small room above, was Mrs. Fjalsted. She was a strange figure, indeed. Her long, yellow hair hung about her in heavy clouds and on her head she wore a wreath of autumn leaves. She had on a ragged dress of some light brown cotton mixture which gave her the appearance of some wood nymph. Her feet were bare and her small son, sitting on the lowest rung of the ladder, was wiping them gently with a corner of his apron, as one wipes the dust from some treasured statue. And the slender little feet might easily have been the feet of Psyche in their sculptured beauty.

"Now, Dearest," he was saying, "just you run upstairs and dream about a lively wish, and little boy'll get your dress all ready for you to put on to-morrow."

"But if I remember another song, will you come and hear it," she begged, starting obediently upstairs.

Sjera Bjarni did not catch the boy's last words, for he had hurried out again feeling like an intruder and a spy, like one who has ferreted out the hidden grief in another's heart. He did not want the child to know that he had seen and understood the pitiful game he played so beautifully with his mother.

When Balder came out again to take up the day's business of washing, it was to see an elderly man, rather short and slender of build and extremely benevolent of expression, come walking up the path to the house. He threw off his apron in confusion, revealing the tatters beneath and stared uncertainly at the visitor.

"Good morning, my son. Is your father anywhere

about?" the minister asked, pretending not to see tub or apron.

"He's gone to haul in our winter's wood. Pa's going up the water at freeze-up."

Sjera Bjarni realized suddenly how very terrible this lad's life must be, left alone in the winter time with the cares of the house and his mother. He wondered what was done about the stock and could not forbear to question the boy.

"What does your father do with the cattle while he is away?"

"Oh, he leaves them at Headland with the men he works for—that is all but Whitey or Red—they're my cows. I can milk," he finished proudly.

"Well, well, you don't say!" the minister said, seating himself on the bench beside the tub.

A series of sharp, noisy barks arrested their attention as Spot came tearing across the field from the woods where he had doubtless been chasing squirrels or some equally elusive prey. The little black dog stopped short of the minister and sniffed suspiciously.

"That's quite a dog you have," he told the boy. Balder flushed with pleasure.

"Yah, he sure is. He's the smartest ever and as brave as a lion. Pa found him up the lake half froze, a year ago."

This confidence brought pleasure to the minister's heart. It proved, he decided, his belief in the existence of something good in each human being as justified. This man Loki was, perhaps, not so black as he was painted.

"I'm come," he told the boy, "to see you because Mrs. Lindal has been telling me what a clever chap you are. I'm wondering if you wouldn't like to go to school."

Balder was covered with confusion and yet delighted to hear that Mrs. Lindal had thought of him this much, and he was child enough to be pleased at his visitor's remark. But he had a wisdom beyond his years—he had leaped from

babyhood into youth, as it were learning through necessity to scramble and fight for himself and to understand that in some way his home was different from any other—that things possible to other children were impossible for him.

"I'd like to well enough, Mister, but you see there's no one but me to mind her." It came out in a rush.

"You mean your mother? She is not so well, I understand," Sjera Bjarni remarked, bending down to pat Spot, who with a wide panting mouth was watching him now, ears cocked up, quite reconciled and inclined to friendliness.

The boy glanced sharply at the minister but seeing him so interested in Spot, thought his studied carelessness could not be assumed. He was relieved and his little heart warmed towards this stranger.

"Yes, she's been kind of sick a long time. You see," he sat down beside the dog, fondling his head with a thin work-roughened little hand, "she sort of forgets things and places and it makes her turrible unhappy at times. And of course she can't do much for herself," he confided to Sjera Bjarni.

"M-hm," the old man relied, "there are often cases like that. Yes, quite often."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" the boy broke out, then reddening, hurried to explain, "I'm not meaning I'm glad there's many sick, Mister, I only mean I'm glad it's not what so many hereabouts says it is."

Then, being but a child and having been through a hard night with his mother, the pent-up worry welled over, and he said, bravely fighting his tears:

"It's crazy they all say she is—crazy!—my Dearest! And her that sweet, you should see her."

Sjera Bjarni was very busy with a notebook he had taken from his pocket. This gave Balder time to wipe away the telltale tears.

"Well, I declare!" the old man exclaimed. "I suppose it's because every one around here is so well they can't understand anything about sickness. There is a sickness of

the mind as well as the body and both very often can be cured."

The little boy's face lighted up with glad new hope. "Oh, Mister! Do you really think Dearest—I mean my mother—could be cured? Do you, honest to goodness?" he begged, laying a hand nervously upon Sjera Bjarni's knee.

"Yes, my boy, I do. I think it is only a question of getting her to a place where there are doctors who understand such trouble as her's."

Balder's face fell again. "Pa would never hear to her goin' away. Besides, what would I do without her?" he whispered.

"You would be brave and let her go. That I know. Then you would go to school, learn to be a fine man, and then when she is all well, you would live together in a big fine house somewhere with only Spot to worry about," Sjera Bjarni told him.

Balder smiled a wet little smile. "That'd be awful nice, Mister, and Dearest could sing all day and I'd learn to play for her some of them instruments that have the angel sounds in them."

The minister peered sharply into the eager face gazing up at him. "You love to sing, do you?" he asked.

"Oh, no. But IF I could only get something to play on! Something with sounds in it like a bird has in its throat—only more! Oh, if I only could! I went once near the place where they had a dance last winter. There was a man there playing something with sounds like I mean, only it wasn't pretty the way it screeched. I don't know what you call those things at all."

"I think you mean a violin. It is an instrument which has in it all the sounds you dream of—the laughter of rivers, the twitter of birds, the moaning of trees and the tears of the heart. It is that kind of instrument you want, isn't it?"

"How do you know? You must be like Dearest—dreamin' pretty things."

"Perhaps, perhaps! We are no doubt all a little like Dearest who dream of pretty things. But let us be glad of the dreams. What would you say then if we could send Dearest away to get well while you went to school and learned also to play a violin like that?"

"Mister," the boy told him solemnly, "I'd work like hell to learn to play like that!"

Sjera Bjarni did not wink an eyelash. "If I can get your father to help us, you can work like —, well, like that. And then some day we'll all be very proud of you."

"Oh Spot, oh Spot! Did you hear? Mister you're terrible fine. Would you like me to make you some coffee?" he added timidly.

Sjera Bjarni laughed merrily. "So you're a cook, too!" He remembered the cluttered table in the kitchen and its unwashed dishes. "I tell you what we'll do. You make the coffee and if your morning dishes are not done, I can do them while the coffee steeps. Then I can just slip down to the fields where your father is."

Balder was overjoyed. Never had he met such a delightful man who seemed to understand one's very thought and to know just what a boy most hated to do.

Once, while they were at the task of clearing the table, the voice from the upper room called. But since the minister seemed in no way to be in the least surprised, Balder ran in and called to her that he was making coffee.

"You can have some too, Dearest, if you just wait a little."

Sjera Bjarni painted in glowing colors for the boy the hope that lay ahead, while they drank the muddy coffee and nibbled some crackers Balder had hospitably set out. They were laughing together like two boys when a shadow passed the door. And then Loki's grim uncouth figure confronted them. He was utterly taken aback. He was

so surprised that he could not summon up his boorishness before the minister had risen and gone forward with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, sir. I'm just come back to take the charge of the settlement. I stopped here, as is my custom at each farm, and have been enjoying the hospitality of your house. Your young son is a capital cook."

Loki, so long used to cold looks and suspicious glances, was disarmed by the minister's friendliness.

"As a rule I've little use for ministers nor the church," he said roughly, but he shook Sjera Bjarni's hand and dropped into a seat by the table.

Balder looked appealingly toward his new friend and ran to get a cup of coffee for his father.

"Well, there are many callings I've little use for myself," the minister countered. "One's likes and dislikes are entirely one's own affair."

"Little boy, little boy!" came the voice plaintively.

"Yes, Dearest," Balder jumped up and ran into the bedroom.

Loki scowled and glanced at Sjera Bjarni.

"Your wife has a nervous ailment of some kind, I believe. There's much done in the way of curing such cases now in the city." He said it carelessly, helping himself to a lump of sugar.

"You're hinting that I should send her to an asylum," Loki snapped.

"I hint at nothing. I'm only saying that there is a way of treating such people which often restores them to their former state."

"All that takes money." Loki turned brick red, "I've been trying to save a little—but it's hard getting on here." It was the most intimate remark he had made to anyone for years.

"It is not for me, a stranger, to give you advice," the minister said, "but I have been thinking there might be a

way of getting someone to care for Mrs. Fjalsted, at least while you're away, so the boy could go to school. He's a clever little chap."

Loki was surprised at himself. He wondered why he did not order this busybody off his land. He wanted to fly into one of his customary rages at visitors but the man before him was so absolutely self-possessed, and withal so friendly, that he was helpless before his good nature. Then, too, in spite of his constant declaration that he could live out his life in isolation from every one, it was a relief to talk once more with some one who seemed to believe that he had good intentions like other folks.

"Well, yes!" He flung the words out as if they burned him. "He's a good sort of kid. Mind's his own business pretty well and is right sharp about the place."

"But you must have noticed what a passion he has for musical sounds," the minister suggested. "He should be given an opportunity to develop it. There may be great things in store for him."

Loki roared! "The son of Loki Fjalsted making music for a living! It's a good joke!"

As if reminding him of another source of inheritance, Anna Fjalsted began to sing. Her song broke in upon his laughter as if to destroy it. And to Sjera Bjarni, listening to the high clear notes, came the realization that here was talent broken on the wheel of life, a glory entirely wasted unless a wise providence had passed it on to the lame boy with his weird bird notes and his love for harmony.

Loki looked as if someone had suddenly struck him in rebuke. "Maybe you're right," he muttered. "She always was a wonder with the singing and the kid'll never be much good for hard work with his lameness and all."

"Of course I knew you were not serious. Now, Mr. Fjalsted, promise me that if I get someone to look after your wife, you will let Balder go to school, and if possibly I get him a violin, don't forbid him to use it. My wife is

coming down to Headland for the Christmas season to help the children with their concert or some such frolic and she could give him a few lessons. It is a harmless pleasure at any rate if it never comes to any more than that, and none of us will be any the worse for giving the child a little pleasure."

Loki scowled darkly, glaring at the minister. He was trying hard to take offense, trying to find in this a chance to order the visitor off his place. But he was honest enough to realize that Sjera Bjarni was not curtain-lecturing. He was only offering a solution such as Loki had been trying of late to find for himself.

"Well," he said ungraciously, "if you see fit to meddle with the affair, I'll not be sayin' I won't let the kid go, and I don't say he can. It'll be pretty hard to get anyone to stay here."

"It may be that," the minister agreed, "but there are so many widows and women without much to do in Winnipeg who dread the coming winter, that I think it quite possible that one of them would be willing to come here for a home and food through the strenuous winter months."

"Well, I'll not be here," Loki said. "If you get anyone they needn't be a-fearin' me. They could do what they saw fit in the house, if they only mind her."

"Very well, then," Sjera Bjarni said, getting up to go. "I'm sure it would be better all around. It may be the means of getting Mrs. Fjalsted into such shape that she could go to a doctor later and it will give the boy a chance to get into a healthier mode of life."

Balder came into the kitchen just as the old man was leaving. His face was a study. Relief and gladness, hope and doubt swept over it in swift succession.

"Goodbye, my boy," Sjera Bjarni said, patting him on the shoulder, "I think we will be able to fix up this little matter. Yes, I'm sure both you and Spot will go to school this winter."

CHAPTER X

THE BROKEN BUD

The heart of Rachel for her children crying,
Will not be comforted.

—*H. W. Longfellow.*

Many changes had taken place along the river front since Borga Lindal's first memorable visit to the town of Winnipeg. The Hudson's Bay mill was no longer sending its smoke into the prairie sky. It had become obsolete, its usefulness ended when the Ogilvie company built their modern plant down on Point Douglas. The old trading fort was also changed. In place of the long, low log buildings was a goodly two-story frame store built a little farther north than had been the first post. Main Street, too, was changed. A team might now travel its entire length through the town and not be in danger of wallowing up to its haunches in adhesive mud. New industries and stores were steadily springing up and the town was spreading north and westward.

In the time when the Hudson's Bay mills gave employment to the poor, among them many Icelanders, there had sprung up a little colony of shacks down on the "Flåts," as the low sloping river bank, running from what is now Water Street to the junction point of the two rivers, was called. But when this occupation failed, these families sold their little homes and drifted north toward Alexander and Ross, that street which was later nicknamed "Icelander's Main Street."

Business houses, mostly of the wholesale nature, replaced

this poor man's town on the flats and by this time very few, if any Icelanders, were living in that neighborhood. But down on Number Six, situated about warehouse Number Six of the Hudson's Bay Company, and in the location of Water Street to-day, several humble families of various races lived in the miserable shanties and houses straggling down toward the river.

Here, in a dingy two-room hovel, the widow of Tate Hafstein was bravely fighting her battle for existence. Katrine Hafstein was a tall heavy-set woman, strong of body and mind, and resolute of soul. There had been no time to give up to despair when her husband lay dead before her. She knew hardly a word of English. She had not a cent to her name, but her two children must somehow be fed and her husband must not be buried in a Potter's field.

Some foolish one suggested that perhaps Mr. Harstone might help the widow if he knew of her extremity, since her husband had died in his employ. But the widow had turned in fury upon this adviser.

"Had my husband been treated like a human being at this man's shop, had he been paid enough to keep body and soul together without working from sunrise to midnight, he would still be alive. I would rather starve with my two children than ask that man for help."

And indeed such an appeal would have availed her little.

Only those who have faced starvation can understand upon how unbelievably little a human being can exist. The widow somehow kept the life in her body and that of her little ones by the work she got to do at home and managed to send a dollar now and again to the undertaker who had been charitable enough to trust her. Doctor Towne who had attended her husband waived aside his bill until such a time as she could more easily meet it. He was one of those very few who see in their profession a great mission as well as a livelihood and a means of profit. In his heart he

never expected nor wanted a cent from the poor widow, but being charitable from the heart rather than from the hand, he wished to give her the comfort of feeling she was not under his obligation.

It was in that first terrible winter after Mr. Hafstein died, that Katrine made a peculiar friend. It was upon a bitterly cold night when, because the problem of getting fuel was so difficult, she had moved her bed into the kitchen in order that she need not keep so great a fire in the small stove standing in the corner. She had just gone out into the yard to carry in a supply of wood when she noticed an old Indian sitting hunched up against the wreck of a tumble-down shanty across the road.

Katrine was a kind woman, and in spite of the fact that she had heard that these natives could live in the open notwithstanding the severity of the climate, she somehow could not believe that any one of flesh and blood could keep from freezing on such a night. She stood looking at the Indian a moment and then ran through the snow to where he sat. She could talk but very little, yet she made him understand that she knew he was cold. She pointed to her little house and held out her hands as towards a warm fire. The old Indian may have been surprised, but his face, like wrinkled parchment, gave no sign. He merely grunted and followed her into the house.

Mrs. Hafstein had been told often by other Icelanders who had previously lived on the flats how the Indians who had hung about the fort and the river had befriended them—how those derelicts of a race once great in native splendor had in their very degeneracy proven a help to the struggling immigrants. Those poor wretches who having lost through the white man's poison, that pride and dignity which once was the red man's most impressive attribute, had gone about begging clothing from the well-to-do and eatables from the city market place, and in turn had sold these things for a few cents to the poor down on the Flats.

Because of these tales and because never to her knowledge had a Red Man harmed a single one of her countrymen, Katrine had had no fear of the Indian. Besides, he was old, so old that he deserved anyone's pity.

She shared her bannock and black coffee with him that evening and then, regardless of the extravagance, she reopened the other room to take the chill off and made him a bed on the floor. During all this the old Indian made no remark. He grunted, perhaps in admiration, perhaps in wonder, at the tiny Lillian so white of body, so flaxen of hair, and grinned a toothless smile at small Margaret as she crept closer to him in her curiosity. And in the morning he went off quite as silent.

But the widow was many a time to feel how good an investment had been this kindness. Old Joe, as he was called, was quite a character. Quite a rascal too, perhaps, for he had learned one of the white man's most clever professional tricks—to live without toil off the mob. No one knew just what he called home nor why he had not left the old haunts as had ere this the most of the Indians. But nearly everyone in Winnipeg knew the old rascal by his laughter—mirth-inspiring, blood-curdling, ghoulis. For wherever a crowd gathered Old Joe would suddenly pop up and for a shower of pennies, would proceed to interpret his idea of the white man's expression of joy.

But rascal as he may have been, he never forgot the poor woman who had shared with him unasked her pitiful fare and shelter. The very next night Katrine had found upon her step a huge cut of meat. It was the first meat she had had since long before her husband's death and it lasted for many days. After that, off and on, Old Joe paid her a solemn visit never leaving without a cup of hot black coffee which he may, or may not, have liked, but which he evidently believed to be a household rite with this woman whom he considered a superior type of the sickly, superficial white race.

And Mrs. Hafstein grew to be quite fond of the ugly old Indian, not entirely because of the gifts he left so often on her doorstep, but because it is so rare in this world to find gratitude for a truly kind act. And, perhaps also because she knew him to be an outcast disinherited in his own country and herself a bit of jetsam drifting in an unfriendly sea.

In the summer when Lillian was nearly two years old, Katrine Hafstein decided to risk leaving her little girls at home and to go out working by the hour. This had enabled her to make a dollar a day and so when Sjera Bjarni Johnson had made her a visit after learning of her struggle, it had been to find her cheerful and full of hope. She would be able to pay the undertaker before fall and buy her winter's fuel. To be sure she would not be able to leave the children alone when the cold weather came, but by that time she hoped to be assured of enough work to take home to keep them from quite the hardships of the previous winter. And then she had said, "The winter will pass and I can repeat this summer's program. So, little by little our circumstances will improve as the girls grow up."

It was with a joyful heart that she hurried home one afternoon about four o'clock. She had asked permission to leave early because she wanted to pay the doctor a visit. Just the week previous her bill for the funeral had at last been paid in full and now she wanted to give the doctor two dollars which she felt she could spare out of her week's earnings.

But Doctor Towne refused the money, telling her to buy the baby something with it instead. And so with a prayer on her lips for so good a man, and a sudden child-like excitement within her soul, she made up her mind as she hurried home to do a reckless and extravagant thing.

Little Lillian had just reached her second birthday on the Sunday past. That dear little laughing baby of hers had never possessed a single toy. Her little velvety body had

never known anything but patched garments made from wornout rags. Her little feet had worn no other covering save slippers made from scraps of felt that her father had gotten for a few cents from the harness shop.

Katrine felt she could not possibly spend all this money on the child as she would like to have done. But she would buy her baby a little toy. How her blue eyes would dance! And, yes! she would buy something good to eat, a little cake maybe, something to make a birthday party with.

With a light step she hurried down Main Street until she reached a little store which displayed in its window a mixture of candies, toys and pastry.

There, as waggish as you please, was a tiny white lamb so plump and woolly, so cunning with its blue bow and brass bell, that the poor widow could have clapped her hands with delight. What child would not love it? she thought. If only it were not too expensive! She went into the store and asked the absentminded clerk in her broken English to be allowed to see the toy. It may have been difficult to understand her in her excitement, or it may have given the stupid clerk a kind of pleasure to witness the poor mother's confusion. For to misconstrue what the foreigner tried to say was a form of sport indulged in at this time and may have been played with certain rules and honors which made it popular. At any rate, Katrine found it most difficult to be allowed to pay her twenty-five cents for the wooden toy. But, when one has been patronized day in, day out, by those for whom one drudges, a tussle more or less amounts to little.

She figured swiftly as the flatfooted clerk shuffled off to wrap up her purchase. If she deprived herself of her morning coffee for a week this would save a little in the way of sugar as well as coffee, and if she bought a knuckle of bone and boiled soup from that for three or four days, she could save five or ten cents more that way. That would make the buying of a few cookies possible and yet not cut too deep a

hole in this precious two dollars which she so unexpectedly had saved.

She looked with longing on a small round frosted cake. How the children would love it! But that was madness! It must cost all of twenty-five cents. So she decided upon a dozen of doughnuts and a few frosted buns. This rashness cost her fifteen cents.

With a deeper joy within her breast than she had known for many months, she hastened on toward Number Six hugging her precious parcels under her shabby shawl.

When she reached her humble shelter it was with surprise that she noted the absence of little Lillian who customarily sat patiently waiting upon the doorstep for her mamma as the day drew near its close. She went into the house, threw off her shawl and deposited her parcels upon the table, then stepping to the back door looked out into the yard. Margaret was there busy at play and jumped up joyfully on seeing her mamma.

"Where is Lillian?" her mother asked, seized with an unreasoning fear.

"She's in front, isn't she?" the child replied. "She just ran around the house a little while ago. She was playing with a little kitty that came, mamma."

"Oh, Margaret, you've let her run away. Why didn't you watch her as you ought?"

Poor little Margaret drew down her mouth and puckered her eyes in threatening tears. "All day long I watch her, mamma!" she wailed as her mother hurried around the house, her little five-year-old soul rebelling at the injustice of the accusation.

But her mother had already forgotten Margaret. She loved this older daughter, certainly, but somehow her heart seemed wrapped up in the tiny child that had come to her in her dire poverty. It was as if by the very force of her love she would make up to the child all it had lacked in comfort and decency.

She ran into the street calling Lillian, but no one answered. She noted in a disinterested way that a small crowd of people were gathered down where the street terminated in the river, but she was not concerning herself with neighborhood affairs.

Thinking it best to go in search of the child she entered the house again to get her old shawl for the wind was chill and she was hot from her afternoon's work and her brisk walk.

When she came out of the house again, a strange procession was drawing near. She saw that Old Joe was at its head, walking with unaccustomed dignity. His old head with its scraggly black locks was held high and his bent old back was straight, as in the days when he, perhaps, boasted his prowess outside his father's tepees. With that peculiar faculty of the mind which in the greatest dangers sometimes fastens its attention on a trivial thing, she marked these things and then reeled, as under a blow, in the doorway and clutched at the woodwork for support.

The old Indian's nondescript rags were dripping with water and in his arms, as one carries a sacrifice to the gods, was a tiny flaxen-haired form. One little hand with a rose leaf palm, lay upturned against the old man's breast, and over his arm the silken ringlets waved in the wind.

"My God, my God!"

It was the agonized cry of one more soul caught in the winepress trodden by greedy feet. Somewhere such cries may gather a retributive storm. Somewhere a Divine ear may hear them.

Overwhelming woe, like excruciating torture, wrings from the quivering nerves no greater suffering than that which is caused by the first hard blow. Katrine, like a bloodless statue, waited in her wretched doorway for the sorry train to reach her. Except for Old Joe she scarcely knew any of the men and women who were bringing home her dead. She did know, however, that the foremost woman was an

Icelander, an unhappy outcast living somewhere down in this neighborhood with her little nameless infant.

The old Indian reached her at last. She stepped forward swiftly, her face passionless, tearless, colorless as wax.

"Give her to me! Give her to me!"

"But she's gone, dear woman. He was way upstream when he saw her fall in," a fat English woman told her with the tears streaming down her red face.

Katrine neither heard nor saw the sympathetic spectators. Old Joe appraised her with his burning black eyes. Like a high priest at the altar he gave the child into her keeping. Here was a heart whose grief he could honor! No weak wailings! No idle cries! Just so, in the far-off noble days had the Indian mother watched her beloved embark for the Happy Hunting Grounds. And just so, too, though he did not know it, had the Norsemen bowed to the decrees of an Inexorable Destiny.

Into the house he followed her, settling down cross-legged upon the floor to watch with her in silence through the dreary night, to stare into the past with its vanished glory and to grieve inwardly for all these things that are and should not be.

Unknown to Katrine, the despised "Magdalene" stole into the house, made a fire and took the frightened Margaret into her care. Once, timidly, she crept to the door with a hot drink, but what she saw made her withdraw quickly. For it takes the maimed to understand the maimed!

Katrine sat in her broken-armed rocker crushing up against her breast the unresponsive Lillian. It was as if the maddened mother thought that by the warmth and love of her own heart's blood she could give heat and life to the little inert form.

But, not even to a mother does God grant this miracle more than once.

CHAPTER XI

WHEREIN THREE WOMEN PLAY A DECE'S ROLE

And the Decces shall go before beckoning
The soul to victory.

—*Icelandic Mythology.*

Sjera Bjarni Johnson was as good as his word. On his next visit to Winnepeg he went in search of someone to take charge of Mrs. Fjalsted. He had intended to get the poor "Magdalene" of the Flats, but found her intrenched in Mrs. Hafstein's little home.

He learned then of the death of tiny Lillian and how this humble woman had offered her all—a few hard saved dollars—to the widow in her hour of trouble. Mrs. Hafstein, who formerly, with the unreckoning condemnation of the self-righteous, had been inclined to despise poor Stina, as she was called, learned the incongruous fact that a human being may sin, as sin is counted in this world, and yet possess qualities generally attributed only to the saintly. So Sjera Bjarni found them living together—an assembling as it were of their forces. They took turn about in going off to work finding that they could live quite well in this way and still have the two children, Margaret and Stina's baby, under the vigil of one or the other of them.

But the old minister succeeded in getting another elderly woman who had recently come from Iceland, and who was glad enough of this home for the time being.

Mrs. Hafstein had become a little grim. There was a settled sternness about her which Sjera Bjarni never liked to see in any face. She told him she had only one object

in life now, to toil day in and day out in the hope that Margaret might some day rise out of their misery.

"One does not get on any better here by the work of one's hands than in the old land. Margaret must learn—she must go to school. This is a hard country."

For she had not yet learned to know that already Canada had laid its tendrils about her heart. That in the very giving of her dead to its keeping, she had bound herself to it irrevocably. She had made in her grief a first bitter payment toward Canadianship for herself and her daughter.

Down along the Icelandic river the days sped on in dull monotony. The men who could leave their homes and had the proper outfit to go fishing, went up the lake when the season opened. Bjorn Lindal and Einar Johnson were among the first to leave and Loki Fjalsted after his wont, went later—and alone.

Balder was a happy boy these days. After Miss Thompson, the maiden lady from Winnipeg, came to take charge of his mother, the whole place underwent such a regeneration that he scarcely recognized it as his home.

Miss Thompson may not have been very intelligent nor overly brilliant, but she possessed one superlative quality somewhat rare among her sex, the ability to say nothing of what displeased her and to make the most of what was hers to command. In addition to this she had an abundance of good health, not overly pious notions, and a kind heart.

Mrs. Fjalsted, who was perhaps more like a child who lives in a world of exaggerated and fantastic imaginations, rather than an adult bereft of reason, soon came to accustom herself to the quiet and sympathetic Miss Thompson. And in her ministrations to this unfortunate fellow being, Miss Thompson found an outlet for all her wasted maternal instincts.

With this happy change come over his home, Balder was free for the first time to mix with other children. To

become, in fact, a child for a time, with an absurdly grave air at play but a deep joy in his heart. When school opened he found the struggle with his English letters a new and absorbing game which was increased in pleasure by the fact that he was free to go with the Lindal children to their home whenever the weather was fine.

There was that fall, for the first time, an English teacher at the little school. A Miss Wake who, truth to say, had dreaded going down to this foreign district expecting to be swamped in garlic and stuffed with fish. She was, no doubt, relieved to find that if garlic must be counted a sin among these people, it would have to be in the category of sins of omission since that obnoxious savory had never even been heard of by the Icelanders. And that, though the Icelanders may have affinities with the fish—both being fond of the freedom of the sea—they might be met separately and solely apart.

This may have been a relief and again it may have been a disappointment, for the most of humanity dislike above all else to have their prejudices dispelled, especially where they concern another race. It has a disagreeable way of diminishing one's esteemed superiority and that is not a pleasant thing.

Then too, Miss Wake not being quite clear whether it was the Icelanders or the Eskimos who has a deep-seated passion for whale oil, had planned on such a campaign of reform—a whole-souled attack upon the dangers of too much greasy fried food, found herself with an entire list of authorities on this baleful habit to the good and with much time on her hands, when she discovered, to her chagrin that these silly foreigners had a way of ignoring the frying pan. Why, they never even had bacon for breakfast, nor sausages! And when they made those funny thin pancakes, they were outrageously Scotch in the treatment of butter. She found, like that wise singer of the people, that "the plans of mice and men gang oft agley."

But, being after all a young enthusiast, she adjusted herself quickly; took a liking to timid Mrs. Peterson, where she was put to lodge, since the Petersons were closer to the school than any other family, learned to say in the singular and plural "kondu sael" and "vertu sael"—how do you do and farewell—to reply "já" and "nay"—yes and no—and to sing from paper with ridiculous pronunciation a merry little Icelandic song. She curled Mrs. Peterson's painfully straight hair on Sundays, much to that poor woman's spiritual discomfort and feminine delight. And after a few weeks was loved by the whole settlement and became quite at home, fond of her bright scholars and amused at the dull ones.

It was on her first visit to the Lindals that she had her real shock. Here she met not only a strikingly attractive pair, but two who could with but very slight dialect talk her own language quite fluently.

"How lovely for your children, Mrs. Lindal, that you talk English so well," she could not refrain from saying. And for the first time, perhaps, in her life, Mrs. Lindal was glad of the long years spent with the kindly Scot and his patient half-caste wife.

"Do you read, too, Mrs. Lindal, may I ask?"

"I did, a little. But we didn't get much except stray papers on the farm and since we came here of course I hadn't seen any English books until the children got their school reader."

Here was a new field at last, thought the little teacher.

"Oh, I have quite a few books. I should love to lend them to you. You see your children are so clever you must keep up with them."

Borga, who was younger in heart than the teacher would have believed—for those who live much in dreams keep a youthful mind, flushed with pleasure and expressed her eagerness at such a chance. In that way a deep and lasting friendship sprang up between the Lindals and Miss

Wake, who spent so much time after that at Borga's, that Mrs. Peterson felt slighted and fell to picking flaws in her friend to her husband when her emotions got the better of her—or perhaps it was when her feet ached from too much labor in the field and house. It is sometimes very hard to distinguish what springs from the heart and what from the flesh.

When the Christmas season drew near, Sjera Bjarni Johnson and his wife came down to Headland. His wife, who was always called Fru Haldora after the Old Country custom, decided to accept an invitation to stay with the Lindals so she could help the children get up a concert which was to take place in the schoolhouse.

Miss Wake had her second rude awakening when she met the minister's wife. Fru Haldora was a small vigorous woman, very plain of face with, indeed, few feminine graces, but with sharp almost piercing eyes, and a vigorous intelligence which so far the world is loath to grant to any but a man. Brilliance in a woman is always a grave mistake—a slip on the part of the Creator—and could not be borne except for the happy coincidence that most intellectual women are plain if not ugly. Which proves, of course, that they should have been men, and that only an ox-eyed stare, red sensuous lips, a round voluptuous body and a simpering speech constitute feminine loveliness. This is no doubt the reason why Rubens' fat females are so much admired even though a Puritan conscience would hang a veil over the chaste statue of the Venus de Milo. A statue is like an intellectual woman. It has not the same appeal to sensuality as a colored canvas of palpitating flesh.

Fru Haldora was so accomplished and so thoroughly learned in the branches which she had undertaken that Miss Wake felt a little ignorant beside her. This was not a comfortable feeling for an instructress and would-be benefactress of the simple rustics. But Miss Wake was not the only one who felt a little awed and repelled by Fru Haldora's rather

chill mannerisms. Her own countrymen could never take to her as they did to her husband. The men felt insulted that a woman should know more than they. It was an impertinence! And the women, for the most part, were afraid of her—might even have hated her except for the fact that she was childless. This gave them a chance to pity her and also to feel that, after all, they had accomplished something which she had failed in.

Fru Haldora was well aware of this attitude but she was born to be a trail breaker. One of the first of her countrywomen to devote time and energy to other than household matters, she knew she had to bear patiently the stones and sticks of criticism. And being sincere in her desire to use her better knowledge for the benefit of the rising generation, she went on quite calmly in the work she had chosen to do and for which she often enough got but little thanks.

She found adequate return for her labor in the happiness she so often brought to the faces of the young—the boys and girls to whom she taught without charge the fundamentals of music. It brought her joy to be able in this and many another way, to set their feet in the paths they longed to go, to be an intellectual guide, taking them into her keeping when they outgrew the solicitations and understandings of their unlettered mothers.

She had been impressed with Balder when she saw him. She recognized in him a fervor of soul which must portend the unusual, and so she did not regret that her husband had spent the money which should have gone for his own winter flannels, to buy this new protege of his a violin.

She had intended giving it him on Christmas, but after seeing him and hearing him at his marvelous whistling she decided to waste no time, but rather to start right in giving him the first lessons.

One afternoon, therefore, when the children came merrily home from school bringing Balder with them, he experienced such a joy as comes but seldom in life. Fru Haldora

was not one for uncertain ambulations round a subject, nor yet fond of sentimental display, so as soon as the children came she spoke to Balder.

"Come here, my boy, I have something which I think you will like."

She bent down and, lifting an old case from the floor, opened it and taking out the violin held it out to Balder.

Perhaps he felt like Thomas confronted by his Master. It is difficult to believe the unbelievable. His thin face paled. He stared at Fru Haldora and the violin in turn. Then, giving a little half strangled cry, he caught the violin in a passionate embrace.

"Oh, Fru Haldora! Fru Haldora! Now I shall learn to play the song of the thrush and the singing river!"

So came Balder into his own. And so for a time it is best to leave him to toil over his books and his beloved violin.

Spring came once again, but not with grace and gentleness. It was rather as if she had been catapulted into the lap of winter and cast forth in a flood of waters. There had been heavy snows in the winter and the whole land seemed to be threatened by complete inundation. The river could not carry the melting snows fast enough and the ground was still frozen too hard to absorb much of it.

The settlers were discouraged and felt little inclined to go about the usual spring work. Einar had not been able to pay his taxes of the previous year because his earnings had been greatly crippled through an attack of rheumatism which he suffered in the fishing season. He intended therefore to try planting a little more oats if perhaps he might be fortunate enough to raise in this way the amount of money he needed. The river had not overflowed extensively in the two previous spring seasons, so consequently the hope of the settlers had risen that the dreaded floods were at an end. But now again it seemed this was not to be. Yet as long as there was no steady northern wind—which, holding

back the waters of Lake Winnipeg from flowing to their outlet, backed them into the river and so over the land—they might escape any serious trouble. And as the days wore on and the hot sun kept coaxing the frost more and more from out the soil, dispelling the water in a two-fold way, their hopes began to revive again, and eventually the fear passed and the seeding began; all the colony taking on the hustle and bustle of an ant hill.

Nothing momentous occurred through all that summer. To be sure, little Thor had the measles and the Peterson children were croupy for months owing to the excessive dampness and even sturdy Tomi developed a hacking cough, which, as his worried mother said, turned him even against his porridge. God save him!

Einar had borrowed money from the Headland merchants to get in his field of oats and as the harvest drew near he and his Finna were in the seventh heaven of hope and delight. Such fine grain! So tall! So thick! So beautifully headed out!

Bjorn Lindal, too, had high hope of his fields, now quite considerable in size when it is remembered that all his clearing and plowing had been done by hand and with slow, plodding oxen.

Then, even as the spring had come, came the premature fall, a deluge of chilling rain. Rain, rain, endless rain! Beating down the grain and swelling the river until finally, like a hungry silver monster, it flung itself over the whole land. The Lindals were the most fortunate, for their land, despite the fact that the river skirted their fields, was much higher than the farms to the south and west of them. Their grain would doubtless be damaged except for fodder, but they were able at least to keep dry in the house and to get about in boots to do the chores.

But the poor Johnsons, whose farm was very low and marshy, had to flee off their place altogether and come to the Lindals. The Petersons, too, fled to this shelter on the

third day of the flood. And so the tiny home of the Lindals was a pretty well-filled ark.

Poor Finna, generally so cheerful in any circumstance, could not refrain from a little self-pity.

"It's my heart that aches when I think of my Einar with his rheumatism so bad in the back, out in that field day in, day out, and now to be flooded! It's not such a good country with such wetness and flies and no railroad, and so it ain't! Oh dear, oh dear, and it's me that thought I could maybe get some flannel for a skirt. You know, Mrs. Lindal, how often I've dyed and patched that skirt I wear on Sundays. It's almost boiled away, and that's the truth. And then my Tomi—a pair of real leather shoes you'll get for school, we told him, when the taxes are paid. And here we are all up to our ears in water and debt!"

This discouragement found echo in all their hearts, though none were quite as seriously injured by the flood as were the Johnsons.

When, in about a week's time, the water had subsided, Mrs. Lindal helped Finna to clean the mud and waste from her little house and the Johnsons began again to make other plans.

"It's no use at all I see in this farming for us, papa, and that's a fact," Finna told Einar when he half timidly suggested whether it might not be better to try something else.

"I could maybe go to Winnipeg and get some carpentry to do. There's such building going on there with the town growing so fast into a big city."

"Of course you could, papa, you so smart with a hammer and all. And it's just as good to go now, papa, instead of going out on the water to get more sickness. You might get something even in the winter in a big place like that and Tomi and I can stay here till you pay the Headland merchants and send for us."

This they eventually decided to do and so Einar set out for the city and in the following summer Finna and Tomi

took their leave of the Lindals and their several friends who gave their well-beloved neighbor as hearty a send-off as their sincere regret in losing her could give.

"It's a visit you'll have to make us, Borga dear," Finna told Mrs. Lindal tearfully upon their parting. "Now that the children are so big, and it's my little Thor you mustn't leave behind either, God bless him!"

CHAPTER XII

THE TURNING OF THE ROAD

Tell me how is Fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourished.

—*Shakespeare.*

The years slipped away quietly, uneventfully, and to the Lindals it seemed that Elizabeth and Nina, little girls one day, were all at once alarmingly grown up the next.

Bjorn was becoming discouraged with the settlement. He saw no future for any of his children if he continued there. He worked hard from year's end to year's end, yet when Elizabeth finished grammar school it was impossible for him to send her away to continue her studies.

Then, too, her mother needed assistance with the ever increasing work about the farm. The Lindals had now a considerable herd of cattle and Mrs. Lindal took great pride in her butter making. She raised from season to season increasingly large broods of chickens and ducks, augmenting from these sources the family budget. All this represented a great deal of labor.

Yet, in spite of this and her husband's fishing it was difficult sometimes to provide the necessities for the family, labor appliances for the farm, and to meet the yearly taxes. But at least, they consoled themselves, the homestead was proved up.

Then, it was with a lighter heart that Bjorn left each season for the fishing trip, for the children were not so helpless now and could render some assistance to their

mother with the chores. And the fljot, troublesome as it had often been, solved nevertheless easily the water question for the stock in winter which was a great blessing.

But the seed of discontent was sown and they had no longer either peace nor faith in their endeavors.

Elizabeth was nearly eighteen years old when her father finally made up his mind to sell the farm if opportunity presented itself. She had grown into a sweet, reserved girl, tall like her mother and with the same deeply colored violet eyes. But her features were more regular. She had within her the same eager questioning and fervor of soul which had never been entirely subdued in her mother, but she gave greater promise of beauty. To see her swinging along a woodland path, with the wind ruffling her soft brown hair and revealing the gentle lines of her slim young body, might easily suggest one of Romney's graceful and stately ladies, transferred from the canvas and her silken draperies and given a rustic garb and the triumph of flesh and blood. She was a serious, calm-tempered girl with a deep longing to follow in the footsteps of the heroines in her few books. She had cried often enough at night when her school days were over and when only the monotony of farm life loomed ahead. But hope dies hard, and so she dreamed happily while she helped with the various tasks, and when her father began to talk so seriously of finding a buyer for the farm, this lent an element of excitement which made life interesting for the time being.

Then there was Balder! She could not think of life apart from this childhood friend. And Balder was a wonderful friend; in the magic of his fingers lay all manner of things. To sit on the river bank with him, while he played some newly mastered melody or, perhaps, one of his weird and haunting improvised strains, was to see a new earth opening before her like a water lily revealing its golden heart. Yet she knew, and this was perhaps why the useless farm tasks irked her, that Balder would not remain much longer in

the river colony. Already he had spent three winters in Winnipeg boarding with Finna Johnson who had accepted butter and eggs and meat in payment for his board. And there he had gone to Collegiate and had also been sent by Fru Haldora to a violin master, since, as she had laughingly said, "You are now grown away beyond me, dear lad, but you must go on. I must live to see my boy lay his hand on the heart of the world."

As for Ninna, she was an exotic flower! She was so lovely even in adolescence that it was almost a crime. To be so beautiful brought with it a certain penalty. She was a disturbing element wherever she went. She might run childishly into a bevy of friendly women, and whereas they had been chatting away about some gossip or other before her coming, they would fall silent and begin scrutinizing her. The mothers of less lovely daughters—and they were all very much less lovely than she—felt indignant at such bold beauty and whispered about her behind their hands. The rough farmers humored and laughed at her as though she were a rare bit of bric-a-brac come suddenly to life for their amusement.

From the earliest time she felt herself to be in some way superior to other children and tyrannized over her companions accordingly. She grew so lovely with each passing year that it seemed a sacrilege even to her mother to ask such beauty to do anything except stay beautiful. As for her father, who always had worshipped this unbelievably pretty child of his flesh, he took it for granted that such amazing loveliness must needs be too fragile to grapple with the labors of life. So as Ninna began to realize that her power over everyone was the result of her charms she developed a thousand winsome tricks much as she had in babyhood, and proceeded to rule her little world all innocently and merrily, yet acquiring too a conceit and selfishness which, sinking their roots into her young heart, began their

hardening process in those formative years which are so all-important in the making of character.

Strangely enough, it was only Thor who escaped her slavery. From babyhood he had evinced a partiality for Elizabeth and to her he told his boyish ambitions and hopes while the very presence of Ninna seemed to irritate him.

It had often been a task for Mrs. Lindal to keep peace in her little nest when her idolized Thor asserted his will against some whim of his pretty sister, for Bjorn, with all a father's blind worship for a lovely daughter, generally insisted that Thor be made to give in to her. But Thor would have taken a beating rather than serve the pretty tyrant and so the poor mother often enough found the enforcing of justice a trying business. But as the children grew older Ninna began to show subtleness and wisdom which might have alarmed her mother had it not been such a relief to find a measure of calm settling over the household once again.

Yet perhaps none of Ninna's worshippers were quite so devoted, quite as blind to any defect as the lame boy with his artist's soul. To have the soul of an artist and not worship at the shrine of beauty is as impossible as to have wings and not fly. As Balder grew older he retreated into a delicate shyness when his old playmate hunted him out. He liked best to sit in some quiet spot and watch Ninna about her gamboling, for she was as frolicsome as a kitten and as winsome. But into his music a new note was creeping, a sweet, plaintive thread of music, like a lone bird's pipe in a still leafless spring wood. And little by little as he watched her with his great black eyes, she became a part of all his musings. She became the Brunhild of his despair, and the Senta of his salvation. Over his romantic soul she exercised the power of an Aida. Like Rhadames singing to the princess of Ethiopia, he might have sung to his Ninna,

Heavenly Aida, beauty resplendent,
Radiant flower; blooming and bright;
Queenly thou reignest, o'er me transcendent
Bathing my spirit in Beauty's light.

But it was to Elizabeth that he told all his plans, all his triumphs, and all his troubles ever since that first day in the wood when she had shyly asked him to join the pluming party. She was the one of whom he expected sympathy and understanding. And all that Ninna was to Balder, he was to Elizabeth.

To this budding romance Borga and Bjorn were blind, as only parents can be blind. To them Balder was as one of the family and almost as dear. Yet once Borga surprised a look on Elizabeth's face while she listened to Balder playing something of Schubert's, which made her uneasy. It reminded her of an autumn day and a young boatman. But the uneasiness passed—Balder was so plainly the same, his frank eyes looked to Elizabeth for approval and that was all. Borga felt a little foolish and ashamed of herself. The children were still only children, they had not been forced into adult life as she had been. So have parents since the beginning of time closed their eyes to the loves of their children.

One afternoon early in September, when Bjorn returned from Headland whence he had gone with a load of oats, he upset the customary calm of his household by telling them he had found a buyer for the farm.

"Bjorn, are you in earnest," his wife demanded.

"Oh joy! Then we can leave this old place," Ninna cried, jumping into her father's lap and squeezing him with all the strength of her lazy young arms.

"And I can go to school, can't I, papa?" Thor joined in happily.

Bjorn nodded his head and tried to disentangle himself from Ninna's embrace.

"And what have you to add, daughter?" he asked of

Elizabeth, who was stirring a cake on the little table by the stove.

"Why, nothing, papa—I think I shall feel a little sorry to go."

"Well, we were lucky to get a bid for the farm, and as soon as I'm through hauling the grain I'm going to Winnipeg to make inquiries for another place. . . . I would like to buy near the city," he told them a little later as he hurried out to the barn with Ninna dogging his steps pleading to be taken with him when he should leave for Winnipeg.

In the evening Balder came over and learned the news. It was hard at first to comprehend just what it would mean, then in a flash it dawned on him—this colony would be hardly home after the Lindals left. Why, there would be no Ninna! There would be nothing to hold him to the colony.

"Where do you think you'll be going?" he asked Bjorn.

"Oh, I can't say. I would like to get a farm near Winnipeg or some town where there is a high school. Thor finishes the eighth grade this fall—and Ninna here, wants to be a lady, eh kitten?"

"Well, I certainly have no sentiment for the farm like Elizabeth," Ninna answered, pulling at a stray curl that teased her pretty brow.

"Oh, you make me sick, Ninna!" Thor snapped, "always slamming Beta"—this was his name for his favorite sister—"and always thinking of yourself."

"Now, now, children," Borga warned them, sending a pleading look to Bjorn not to notice this outburst. Whereat Ninna flew to her and kissed her flushed cheek saying,

"Poor old mummy, always afraid her thundergod will get spanked."

And Balder, seeing her so sweet, thought, "Where is there anyone to equal her?" and longed to shake Thor for charging her with selfishness.

This scene was broken in upon by the sound of wagon-

wheels. Ninna rushed to the door. "The Petersons are here," she told the family, and ran outside calling merrily to Runa and Bensi. Her mother went to the door to urge the young folk in, but Ninna was already seated between Bensi and his sister in the new buggy with its team of horses which was the envy of all the settlement, and blew her a caress on an impertinent finger.

"We won't be long, mamma. I'm going home with Runa to see her dress. I promised to go last Sunday."

Runa was to be married in the fall.

"Well, I declare," her mother exclaimed, as the team whirled away, "that child is getting beyond me. She does just as she feels like."

"Oh let her be happy while she can, mamma. You know what a bit of mischief she has always been," her husband placated her. "Besides, what girl doesn't want to see a wedding dress!"

The night was still young, so Thor pulled out his books and read aloud to his parents as they had encouraged him to do from the first. "You must read mamma all your pretty stories now," his mother had told him when he was learning his English letters, "just like mamma read you or told you all the stories she knew." So the habit had been formed and had become a part of the routine of life.

But Balder was restless. Thor was reading from a book Miss Wake had sent him the previous Christmas, his favorite poem:

My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure.

Poetry always affected Balder strangely. Behind the words was a melody and this melody either crushed or delighted him, and always it aroused the music in his own

soul. But this night he seemed to be groping behind a heavy cloud, he neither heard clearly nor felt any answering emotion in his breast.

Sometimes on lonely mountain meres
I find a magic bark;
I leap on board; no helmsman steers;
I float till all is dark.
A gentle sound, an awful light,
Three angels bear the Holy Grail,
With folded feet, in stoles of white
On sleeping wings they sail.

Thor's voice, wonderfully expressive for a boy so young, went on. And suddenly Baldar was steeped in a loneliness such as he had not experienced since his days of early childhood. He was a Galahad with an earthly objective. The prize he coveted, an artist's crown. And, to him all the angels in stoles of white could not be more beautiful than the golden-haired Ninna. And no love could have been more like a vestal flame than that which now flared high in his young heart.

Elizabeth saw that he was miserable. "Let's go down to the fjot," she suggested, "we won't go there much more together now."

He was glad to go with her. Elizabeth always made him feel at peace with the world. She had a way of ignoring peevishness and temperamental gloom. Many a time when he had had a trying day with his mother and all the world looked black, he had found again the blue of the sky and the gold of the sun as soon as she led him off to the fields where the lazy river crawled slowly along between the maples. They went now in silence and sat down upon the bank. The Lindal farm was very picturesque. The river made a loop through the field at the foot of the knoll on which the house was built, and the approach to the house, as

well as this piece of land which lay in the curve of the river, was heavily timbered with beautiful maple trees.

The moonlight lay in gleams upon the water except where, like Indian filigree, the shadows of the branches darkened the river's silver bosom. They sat there, these two, in the silence and the sweetness of the lovely night; with the same ache in both their foolish hearts, and yet as widely severed as are the two poles.

"You're going to Winnipeg this winter, aren't you?" she asked because the gloom on his lean, dark face was beginning to worry her.

"Yes, Sjera Bjarni thinks he can get me a place in some orchestra. It may be tiresome work but it will bring me money to go on with my career. He thinks I should go to St. Paul or Boston, but you know how long it will be till I can save enough for that."

"Still, it's a joy to work at what one likes," she suggested timidly.

"We can't all be satisfied with everything, like you," he answered crossly.

Had he been thinking less of himself he would have seen that her face went white. Then she laughed softly. "Oh Balder, you are in a peevish mood! But, to-morrow you will play a new melody! When you are a great musician, you'll laugh at all these troubles that now worry you, and you'll forget all about your simple friends of these days."

He turned and looked at her, swift anger in his eyes. She was leaning against the wrinkled bole of a magnificent maple and the moonlight lay like a caress upon her finely chiselled face. She smiled upon his anger. For the first time, curiously enough, he saw that she was very charming, but somehow this only displeased him. Elizabeth was Elizabeth, she had no business to be pretty.

"You talk like a fool. You know I could never forget any of you—not any of you. You know that if I succeed

it'll be because of Sjera Bjarni and you folk. What else, I'd like to know, have I to struggle for?"

"Listen!" he broke off, and all the gloom slid from his face. It was Ninna's voice singing a silly song. The Petersens were bringing her back home.

CHAPTER XIII

A WELCOME LETTER

Good news falls like vesper bells
Upon the simple heart.

—L. G. S.

"Oh, papa! Oh, Tomi! What do you think! Mrs. Lindal and Elizabeth are coming to see us! Picture it! What a surprise it will be for them to see us so fine and Tomi so big."

Mrs. Johnson set her coffee pot down and faced her two men across the new square, golden-oak dining table.

"Well, mamma, that will be fine! You will have to show them the town," Einar beamed his pleasure.

"My goodness, and won't I have to get busy. It's on Saturday they'll come and this is Thursday already. Tomi, you'll have to rake the yard when you come home from work. It's those little scamps from the red house that will play in it—not but that I like them, the round imps, but it's a nuisance, their cans and papers, and that's a fact."

"Gee, ma," Tomi turned red, "Elizabeth must be pretty big now."

Finna looked knowingly toward Einar where he was inelegantly dipping his rusk into his coffee. "Would you, now? He makes out he's forgotten that his little sweetheart was two years younger than himself. And has the news knocked the memory out of you, maybe?" she teased her uncomfortable son.

"Oh, shucks, ma, can't a fellow talk! You know I've no use for girls anyway."

"Have some more pie, dearie. It's your mother that's getting old and foolish not to remember what a hatred the lads have for the ladies at twenty. It's not a Solomon you are dearie, and that's the truth!"

Tomi squirmed and banged his fork down. But his parents laughed gaily.

"Papa," Finna called after her husband when he hurried out of the little yard to return to his day's work, "it's a little can of varnish you might bring home to-night. It's on the hall I'd like to have it, to be all shiny for the Lindals."

"Ma," Tomi yelled from the upper regions of the house, "where are my best pants? I want to take them to the cleaner's."

Finna chuckled merrily to herself. "It's down here they are, dearie. I was fixing the pocket with a hole in it."

When her two charges were off to work, Finna started to give her already scrupulously clean house a good "ridding" out. Such an impression she wanted to make! Such a dinner, too, to plan for her dear Mrs. Lindal.

The years had treated Finna Johnson kindly. She was hardly any older in looks and her thin, sallow face was as jovial as ever. But their fortunes had changed greatly. Why, as she herself said, here they were all so fine in a modern house on Maryland Street—six rooms and a bath, a white bath as pretty as a dish, and a walk all round the house! And here was Einar doing well in the carpentry trade and Tomi such a smart decorator. Some day he would have his own business and a telephone! And here she was, a queen in her little home with a brown silk dress that her Einar had given her and a green carpet in the parlor. Who would ever have thought of such things on the farm!

She went into the front room, as she did every so often these last days, because in the center of the only wall not broken by window or door, was an amazing thing. A

piano! a shining black piano that her Tomi had sent home last week for her birthday gift. "Picture it, papa!" she had told her husband with the tears running down her face, "what a goodness to his old mother! Me with a piano and such red hands. It's ashamed I'd be to touch it. But it's good care I'll take of it and maybe it's a pretty little wife he can give it to later."

She leaned now against the wall admiring the gloomy looking instrument from all angles. "It's eighteen she is," she said out loud, "and a sweet little thing she was too." Then, in a somewhat shamefaced way, peering first through the window, she sat down upon the smart new stool, and with a work-hardened finger picked out slowly and painfully the air of a little love song. When she finished, she wiped the white keys with her spotless apron, closed the keyboard and, still humming the tune, went into the dining room about some further task.

The Johnsons were indeed doing well. The house was comfortable and cheerful and in another year it would be paid for. Since Tomi had begun earning good wages, his mother had given up keeping boarders as she had done the first years and rested now upon her laurels.

She was a pillar in the Good Templar Lodge where no social was ever complete without her. Mrs. Johnson was always willing to do this and to do that and her good nature and humor were never failing. Einar was still her shadow, being the same shy man of other days, but he was welcomed everywhere on her account and basked in her glory.

Tomi was a great, goodnatured giant, strong as an ox and tender-hearted as a girl. His rather stolid face was lighted with some of that same cheerfulness which characterized his mother and he was far from being stupid though he could not have been counted brilliant. He was fond of reading, and being patient in all things read carefully the duller work. He was the type of man who grew

slowly into his knowledge but, once having grasped a principle, would never forget it.

He belonged to the athletic society and found enough recreation in that to satisfy his healthy energy. As he had said to his mother, though the girls at the lodge often smiled quite boldly—and though he might banter them if he was in the company of other lads, yet he fled from them if he were alone, and saw no charm whatever in any of them. This is generally the case where a boy is sound mentally and not imaginative. First love is generally only a passion for romance. Imagination fastens upon some attractive companion as the ideal. It is not a case of loving the individual—it is a case of loving love. Tomi was too prosaic to be worried with imaginings. The only dreams he ever had were caused by too much pie. He might escape, therefore, the sweet miseries of youth's first infatuations, but when he did become love's victim, it would be so much the worse, since his would then be so much more a real desire.

As his mother flew about the house sweeping here and polishing there, and airing out the little extra bedroom, she kept somehow thinking of Elizabeth and the red blood which had rushed to her Tomi's face on hearing of the coming visitors.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CANDLE AND THE MOTH

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

—*Shakespeare.*

Borga Lindal could hardly believe her eyes when she stepped out of the train in the new depot at Winnipeg. Where was the snake-like muddy road? Where were the tumbledown houses? What was all this hustle and bustle and noise? This rattling of swift-moving traffic on hard smooth streets? Winnipeg was not a village—not a town. It was a city! Its streets were reaching out hungrily over incredibly large areas. Its business houses, its banks, its hotels, were everywhere. She was as one in an Arabian Night's dream when she fell upon Finna's welcoming bosom.

"Why Mrs. Johnson, can this be Winnipeg?" She stared stupidly at the street cars and the hotel busses. She looked in vain for the little creek which had cut through the town near Market Square. Why, there was no sign of any water! In the spot where the awful, marshy pond had been after the great flood in 1880 was a splendid building.

"Sure, dear," Finna told her as she pointed to it, "that's the city hall."

So it went the whole way toward Finna's home. Mrs. Lindal was amazed and full of questions and Elizabeth was quietly interested.

It was with deep pride that Mrs. Johnson ushered the surprised women into a street car. One might have thought the conveyance her own, so personal was her delight in this new and wonderful convenience.

"It's not quite like walking through the muddy lanes, is it, Mrs. Lindal?" Borga shook her head and whispered in Icelandic that it certainly was an improvement.

"How well I remember the wet rambles Bjorn and I had in those days before our marriage. You remember, Finna, that we were married the year before the big flood. Winnipeg certainly was far from pleasant at that time."

When they walked up Maryland Street, Finna pointed out the various houses and their history and she could not help shining forth her sincere pride when she led her visitors up the tidy walk to her own snug, white house.

"Such a house, now I'll bet, you never thought your old friend would be having. Come right in and be at home." She motioned them into her tiny parlor and when they were seated stiffly upon the slippery plush chairs, she perched for a moment on another seat close by. She wanted only to see the effect of the green carpet and the big piano with its gallery of photographs. Then she excused herself to slip out into the kitchen to put on the faithful kettle and also to leave her two friends to admire her treasures freely.

And to Mrs. Lindal, fresh from her bare log cabin, Finna's home was the last word in elegance. The nice white lace curtains with their rosebud pattern, the green chenille hangings between the dining room and parlor doors, the upholstered chairs and the highly polished center table with its geranium in a paper covered pot, all were marvels of refinement; and then the piano! My goodness! the Johnsons must be rich!

In the dining room they could see the gleaming glass of Finna's sideboard and the inviting snowiness of her big, square table. Everything was there to make a homey picture. Everything, even the cat. For there she was too, sleek and

black as the great piano, and curled up in lazy comfort on the fourth chair in the parlor. As if she resented the friendly curiosity of these visitors, she opened her eyes, glowing and green as a Becky Sharp's, got up slowly, raised her back in an alarming hoop, opened a very red mouth in a very big yawn and leaped away. These visitors from the country were nothing in her young life.

Elizabeth, who loved cats, would have run and caught the creature back had she not thought it belittling to her dignity as a guest and to her eighteen years. Mrs. Johnson, breathless with suppressed excitement, hurried in again. She had removed her hat and jacket and came now to show her guests to their room and to relieve them of their wraps.

When she took them to the tiny spare bedroom with its ribbon-tied Nottingham curtains, its white enamel bed and bureau and small rocking chair, she bubbled over with explanations while Borga smoothed her brown hair and Elizabeth admired herself for the first time in a mirror accommodatingly large.

"Maybe you would like to wash a little before we have our coffee." She took her willing friends across the narrow hall and with a pride of some noble opening a treasure vault, invited them into the little white bathroom.

"You never would have thought it—me with such a bathtub! And all these little racks that my Tomi fixes for me. 'That's the way the rich houses are, mamma,' he says, 'and some day I'm going to put you in a tile floor'—not that I know what that is, bless him. It's a grand son he is Mrs. Lëndal, and such a husband for some girl he'll be making."

She glanced sharply at Elizabeth when she made this subtle allusion, but Elizabeth was sitting on the edge of the immaculate tub deep in dreams. She was thinking how wonderful it must be to live in this amazingly big city—so full of strangely fascinating noise and endless surprises. Finna was a bit disappointed that her son's name created no more impression than this, but she was relieved too.

Elizabeth was prettier than she had expected and very sweet, no doubt, but then Tomi was a good son. She would be glad to have him to herself as long as possible.

"It's like this, Mrs. Lindal," Finna replied to her friend's question as to when they had bought the house, "when papa got that thousand dollars for his homestead from the Headland merchants—they wanted it for hay land—we thought best to put the money in a house. 'But you don't need to pay all that money on a place' my Tomi told us. 'Five or six hundred will do and then you can get some furniture to go with it.' To be honest, Mrs. Lindal, the stuff I had would have disgraced the house, and that's a fact! So my Einar and my Tomi they bought this place—it was pretty shabby, but with a carpenter like papa and a decorator like my Tomi, it was a changed house before I moved in. Just one more year now and it will all be paid for."

Borga was truly delighted. Her's was not a mean nature. Yet, being human she was also glad to be able to inform her old friend that now they too were about to enter upon better days.

"Two thousand dollars Bjorn is getting for his land and a good team of horses besides. He has gone now to look at a farm he heard of through Sjera Bjarni. It is not so far from Winnipeg and is close to a town where Thor can get the higher grades. Good prairie land, the minister said, with a timber house nearly new. The man who owns it is not well enough to farm and wants to return to England."

"Well now, won't that be just the grand thing! And Elizabeth here, will she be going with you? Or is she, maybe, going to look for work in Winnipeg?"

The hot blood surged into the girl's face as her vaguely formed desire was now boldly declared by their old friend.

"Oh, Mrs. Johnson, I would so like to! Mamma, couldn't I stay? It will be hard for papa at first on the farm. Ninna can help you about the house and I could buy Thor's books then."

Borga was a little taken aback at the excitement in Elizabeth's voice. She had not considered this possibility. What a fascination the cities have eternally for the young! They had by now followed Mrs. Johnson downstairs again and into her roomy kitchen. For, while mere visitors may be entertained in the chill reserve of the parlor, good friends may be admitted to the hominess of the kitchen.

"Why Elizabeth," Borga said, seating herself by the table under the window, where a backward fuchsia was leaning hungrily toward the setting sun, "what do you know about the city or its work—what could you do, child?"

"Now, I'm not suggesting it, mind, Mrs. Lindal," Finna broke in, "but Miss Olson, her that's such a fine dressmaker with a real shop, was saying to me at the last lodge meeting that she didn't know where she was to turn for sensible girls now that the winter season is coming. Such goings on as there are here in winter! Dances and theatres and what not! I declare, Mrs. Lindal, you wouldn't believe what folderol there is! And so many dresses these rich ladies have—and the skirts so wide like a cape and silk such a price! It might just be that Elizabeth could get work there. It's a good business, is the dressmaking, and with no temptations. For, it's a real sickness Miss Olson says she has from seeing such fat ladies in such foolish frills—and never a taste for anything but the simplest she has. Her with so much money in the bank and no kith nor kin to spend it on, poor thing!"

Elizabeth was wild with delight. The work, of which she knew nothing, held no especial significance to her mind. She saw only days and days of rapturous living ahead in this city with its teeming thousands. Here opportunity must stand at each and every door. What things she might learn, what experiences might not become hers! But perhaps the real and greatest cause for her delight was Balder.

While the guests enjoyed Finna's strong coffee and her delicious cakes, they threshed out the pros and cons of this

possibility and Mrs. Lindal consented that on the following Monday she would go with Finna to see Miss Olson.

"And it's right with me she can stay, the dear girl, me with no daughter at all and such a big house. It'll not be so lonesome I'm thinking when Balder comes for the winter and my own Tomi such a boy with a laugh in him."

Finna had hardly ended this sentence when the back door opened and her son came in. His mother noted with secret amusement that he had made certain no tell-tale marks of his honest, if somewhat common trade, were visible about him.

He came forward to greet the visitors a trifle awkwardly, but grinning an infectious smile. His healthy sunburned face deepened in color. His merry blue eyes took in the slimness of the girl standing up to meet him and retreated confused from the delicate face so charming in its present animation. He was conscious only of her, but managed as courtesy demanded, a few words for Mrs. Lindal who was a little alarmed at the flush on this strange young man's face. This was not the Tomi of woollen stockings and porridge days! This amazingly big giant with a strong firm handclasp!

"Why how the time passes, to be sure," she said a little shakily, as if she realized for the first time that children have an uncomfortable way of growing up.

"Tom," Elizabeth unconsciously gave him the benefit of his full-grown name, "how nice it is to see you." She gave him her hand in gay camaraderie, laughing up into his face. Poor Tomi had a new and startling sensation in the regions of his fourth rib.

"Oh, say now Elizabeth, it's great to see you! I hope you'll like the place. There's lots to see, you know. And how's everyone in the country?"

It was a long speech and he was quite breathless when it ended, welcoming the excuse of sitting down to a cup of his mother's excellent coffee to cover his confusion. Finna,

past mistress in noting little things, marked that her son, usually so extravagant with sugar and cream, drank his cupful innocent of either.

It seemed that they had hardly quitted the afternoon coffee before Einar came home and it was time for the evening meal. Then it was that Tomi took the bull by the horns, and asked Elizabeth to go to the theatre.

"There's always a crowd out on Saturday nights and there's a good show on at the Grand."

"Oh, mamma, could I? And shall I put on my new muslin dress?" Elizabeth was as eager for the adventure as a child for Christmas Eve.

"Sure, let the children go," Finna advised. "It's myself that wants to take Mrs. Lindal over to Sjera Bjarni's new house. It's we that are glad to have him in our fine church, but the folk at the river must miss him these last years."

"Indeed and that's true, though the new minister is well meaning and a good speaker. But I guess there's only one Sjera Bjarni in the world. Yes, Elizabeth, run along and fix up a bit. Poor child, it's little enough she has," her mother added to Finna as Elizabeth flew up the stairs.

What her mother had said was true enough. But Elizabeth was one of those fortunate few who seem to give character to whatever they wear rather than to be dependent for charm upon their personal adornment. When she skipped down the stairs to meet the neatly attired Tomi, solid and substantial looking in his dark blue serge, her plain light green muslin appeared a very adequate setting for the charming fervor of her youth. Her face, always pale, with that lily whiteness which has so often been the chief charm of the daughters of the far north, had none the less an aspect of good health. Beneath such lovely skin rich blood must flow. Her thick brown hair, neither lost in a bewilderment of curls as was Ninna's, nor yet straight, like that of the sorrowing thousands, billowed away from

her small face with a grace all its own. And as Tomi met her heavily fringed eyes, wide now and dark with the excitement of her soul, he felt in his honest young heart all those emotions though still vague and indistinct, which prompted the poet to write, in momentary sincerity or passing pleasure the pretty old song:

O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That newly sprung in June;
O my Luvè's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.
As fair art thou my bonnie lass,
Till a' the seas gang dry.
So deep in luve am I,
And I will Luve thee still, my dear

But poor Tomi would have been the last to recognize within himself any such sweet sentiment. Sincere natures are almost invariably inarticulate and great affection grows without ostentation, its seed falling into the quiet of the heart as does the corn into the moist warm earth.

As the door closed upon their happy laughter, Finna heaved a resigned sigh:

"To be sure and it's old we're getting, Mrs. Lindal, with the babies running off to the show in such a *grand style*."

CHAPTER XV

DECEMBER SYMPHONIES

Ring out, ye crystal spheres!
Once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the base of heaven's deep organ blow
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full concert to the angelic symphony.

—Milton.

It is well that youth has a spirit as flexible as India rubber, that rosy dreams grown dun-colored at eve can be buried with a tear and quickly forgotten; that hope can soar in a bright balloon and return to earth unharmed in a parachute of cold fact. Were it not for this healthy fickleness, life would perish in the storm of its grief and wither in terror at its very root.

Elizabeth had not been many weeks with Miss Olson when she began to realize that even the city has its dullness and monotony. It had been quite exciting at first to sew hooks and eyes on the gayly colored dresses. It had been nothing less than a revelation to see the women, young and old, fat and thin, who stormed the portals of Miss Olson's well-known shop in ever-increasing numbers as the holidays grew near.

But all at once the amusing side of all this fell away. She was quick to learn and nimble with her hands and Miss Olson was quite as quick to realize these good points. So, as the work increased, more and more the unpleasant tasks

fell to Elizabeth's share. The other girls who knew more of the business were equally rushed but they at least had the pleasure of doing something which inspired interest. But she had to stand day in, day out at the pressing board or to literally sink herself into a heap of hookless and buttonless garments and sew and sew till her unaccustomed fingers were numb and stiff. Miss Olson was a kind little person in reality, but the ordeal of keeping the good favor of her exacting customers had pretty well drained her of an overflow of sympathy. She was paying Elizabeth three dollars a week, which was more than she need have paid a girl who entered her employ as an apprentice, so she gave her no further thought except when she marked with inward thankfulness that she had in her the makings of a good seamstress and that as yet she had neither scorched nor ripped anything.

When, therefore, the first excitement of Elizabeth's new life had worn away, and only the tiredness and the smell of steaming cloth followed her home each evening, it would have been a badly disillusioned girl who crept each night to her tiny bedroom, had it not been for the ever-cheerful Finna and her devoted Tomi. Or, perhaps, for that other blessing, the rebounding quality of her young heart.

Balder came late in November and though Elizabeth was now occupying the room which had been his in the previous winters, he found a ready welcome, and Tomi assured him that there was plenty of space for both of them in his room. After that the day might be as dismal as it pleased; Miss Olson might fret and her customers might fume and the buttons might run on forever, but at night there was always that bright hour when Balder played or talked of his work. There was Sunday too, when all the irritations of a dress-maker's shop faded into the dim past of yesterday and loomed up but faintly in the far-distant to-morrow.

Gentle day, when in their Sunday best the entire family—as Finna proudly called them—went in sincerity and sober-

ness to listen to the sermons that their dear old minister delivered; with a little less fire than of old, but if possible with even deeper sympathy and understanding. For they were all simple folk, not as yet smitten with the modernism which renders gladly enough unto Caesar that which is Caesar's but denies unto God that which is God's. And simple Mrs. Johnson derived no less joy from her brown silk dress, nor Elizabeth from her new bonnet, because those things were forgotten within the severe walls of the plain little church, where the sunshine of our Lord fell softly through the panes of colored glass upon the faces of His children.

Simple people these, who knew nothing of the cultured contempt for the faith of our fathers. They knew nothing of the modernism which denies to God the inspiration of art and philosophy—to the creator of beauty a voice in its praise. And no wonder, for in their ignorance they were not even aware that any such theory as modernism existed. They were still at heart the same God-fearing Icelanders, seeing in all good things the grace of their Master and in all sorrow the trials of His cross.

They were still children enough to think that the noblest aim in life is to see and seek the lovelier side of natural-existence, and so they still read and loved the old books. They had much to learn! Meanwhile they went on in the dimness of their light doing what seemed good and acceptable to them.

In truth Elizabeth saw little enough of Balder for he had secured the position of second violin at the Grand Theatre and had gone to work immediately upon his arrival. But there was one occasion which both she and Tomi, each with a separate and secret desire, awaited impatiently the entire week. This was the Saturday night's performance at the Grand. To Tomi it meant an enchanted hour with Elizabeth. To Elizabeth it meant the rapture of listening for the strains of Balder's wonderful

violin—that violin which he had labored long and hard to get when his talent outshone his poor little first love, and whose soaring qualities even the jangling music, thought best suited to the ear of the amusement seeking public, could not quite obliterate.

The week before Christmas was for Elizabeth one endless whirl of blinding work. Lace and frills at the shop, stitches and tucks at home. For the first time in her life, Elizabeth had some money of her own. This was a great adventure, but stretching it to obtain gifts for each dear one was a struggle to which she was hardly equal. Still, somehow the miracle was performed. A dollar is sometimes, if rightly coaxed, quite a tractable ally. And so she went one frosty night very tired, but very happy, loaded with little white parcels to the postoffice.

Tomi went with her, and to see them sauntering, laughing and merry, through Central Square, one would not have suspected how tired had been the little fingers at their loving task, how thin her rubberless shoes nor how inadequate her shabby old coat. Perhaps a generous God smiles in understanding upon his foolish ones, and this may keep their prodigal blood from freezing.

There was once a woman with a jar of precious ointment rebuked by the prudent for her extravagance. . . . Perhaps each gift causing self-denial, however trivial it may be, is not without significance. . . . The feet of God must even yet be very weary!

At any rate this night was one of mildness and beauty. The city was dressed in its smartest garb. It billowed in hoarfrost. It glowed softly golden behind this white sheen. The darkness was as an opaque canvas against which the soul of Winnipeg stood out a lovely and radiant thing. There was no wind and the voices of the hurrying people drifted through the air in broken cadences. Now a woman laughed, now a childish treble trembled in the silence like a bird's song and again a deep voice broke through the inter-

mittent quiet like an organ note. And always in due subjection like the hum of a faithful motor, came the sound of distant traffic with the occasional beat of swift, sharp hoofs and the rattle of swerving wheels.

Each pedestrian seemed to have caught some happy vision and so the very air vibrated with an abundance of good will. Even as the trees wore with grace the feathery and incomparable beauty of the hōarfrost, so it seemed that the hurrying multitude wore the fleeting graciousness of a new love for their fellow men—that ever struggling love which breaks forth with such strange ease only at the Christmas season. Against the black shadows the golden lights flickered, misty and soft, through the whiteness of veiling snow; like the twinkle in tear-washed eyes. For the soul of a city is the most wonderful thing in the world. It is fed by knowledge and ambition; it is tempered by adversity and grief; it is beautified by love and honor and it is made eternal through sacrifice and death.

So as Elizabeth and Tomi hurried down town, jostling this one and that one, meeting smiles and hearing laughter, they were as happy and content as it is given mankind to be. On their way home Tomi suggested that they go to a little cafe and sitting there in the smoky and humid atmosphere, drinking some very bad coffee and nibbling some stale cake became an enchanting and pleasurable event.

When they reached home Finna met them in the hall, very red of face and with the odors of much baking hanging about her like a heavy perfume.

"It's a grand surprise I have for you! Look in there would you!" she said, flinging wide the door to her trim parlor, revealing a symmetrical and fragrant tree bare as yet of frivolous adornment but beautiful in its dark green dress.

"But why, mamma," her son wanted to know; "none of us are babies now!"

His mother waved this grown up wisdom aside as just so

much babble. "It's a queerness to my way of thinking," she rebuked him with voice and eye sniffing decidedly, "if it's children we can't all be on our blessed Lord's day, and that's the truth! A queerness Tomi, and its ashamed you should be, God pity you. Besides, aren't those round imps from the red house small enough to like a bit of a tree? Poor things. Picture it! Them with a mother gone into a dark religion with no trees or such-like! Aren't they small, I ask you again? Or is everyone born grown up in this wise country?" She strove for sarcasm as her son appeared crestfallen.

"Well, now, that's different, mamma. We'll just fix it fine for the little things, won't we, Elizabeth?"

"It's a loose tongue you have, lad, but a good heart. It's a little corn you might pop if you've a mind to, while the fire's hot. My, my, but it's a deal of work this Christmas business, and isn't it the truth! There's a bit of a drop on the pot should you want it," she called to them as she ran back into the kitchen and rushed to the stove just in time to rescue a couple of steaming mince pies.

And so Christmas Day came at last. To Elizabeth's surprise, she experienced none of the loneliness she had anticipated on this her first holiday away from home. In the morning, after the ancient habit of the Iclander, Finna wakened her family by bringing them all a tray of cakes and coffee to the bed.

"Merry Christmas and may God bless you. It's a fine day for merry making. See, how the sun shines!" she told them. Her kind old face was wreathed in the happiness which service brings to the unselfish and her thin frame wore a kind of wholesome dignity in its neat black dress and stiff white apron.

Such a dinner they had with the table just groaning with good things, and with Elizabeth and Finna hopping up every little while to bring something more.

"Goodness me, where did we put the sauce for the pudding!" or, "Lad, if I haven't forgotten the biscuits!"

In the dusk Finna insisted that they all sit around the trees and watch its twinkling lights. Then Balder played as only he could play for them that old and very beautiful hymn, beloved of all peoples who remember the little Christ child, "Holy Night, Hallowed Night." In the magic of that music the small room widened into a star-filled plain. The shepherds were there with their fleecy flocks. The hills rolled away, revealing the dreamers that followed a star; the odor of myrrh and frankincense hung about them, and the glory of the Lord, which is a sweet content, covered them as in a cloud. "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men," the violin sobbed and trembled in its ecstasy. Dear simple Finna wiped her eyes and Elizabeth gazed at Balder as if he were a god.

"Lad, lad, but you will make the world weep some day. What a goodness in the Lord to give you such a soul. But look now," Finna dived under the tree, "it's not much we could give you, but it's a warm shirt for the winter—you so thin, poor lad! And out so late each night. No, no, don't thank me, it's ashamed I am of it, and that's a fact."

So it went. From under that little tree mysterious bundles issued, each one containing something of love and cheer for the recipient. Elizabeth was wild with joy on receiving a silk scarf from the Johnsons and no less pleased with a book from Balder. Finna was like a child when her son laid a box in her lap and every one gathered close to see just what mamma would say. It was a set of furs from her men folk.

"Why, picture it! What the ladies will say at the lodge, ~~me~~ so covered in fur like an Indian or a millionaire's wife! But papa, Tomi, what an extravagance! You with new underwear to get after a few washes!"

In the evening the "wee imps" from over the way had the unalloyed joy of watching the tree and of eating all

their elastic stomachs could hold. With a bit of a toy, bless them! and a hope that they might not be sick. Then to crown the day, Sjera Bjarni and his wife dropped in for a merry greeting and stayed for a joyous drop and an hour of music.

When, late that night, Finna slipped from room to room with a kind goodnight—with the Icelanders lovely, "God grant you gracious rest"—there was perhaps no happier woman in Winnipeg than she in spite of her tired body. For the wages of love are abundant life.

CHAPTER XVI

A DECISION AND A WISH

Whence is it, sir, that none contented lives
With the fair lot which prudent reason gives
Or chance presents, yet all with envy view
The schemes that others variously pursue?

—*Horace.*

The Lindals had been living something like two years in their new home and were getting on remarkably well. Bjorn had been lucky with his stock and the crops had been more than average. For the first time in her life Borga had the exciting pleasure of selecting furnishings for her house—something not home-made—and the no less novel experience of being able to buy what she needed and liked in the way of clothing.

Ninna was a factor to consider when these things were done. She by now had a decided opinion of herself and her due.

The new farm was two miles out from Caldwell, a town of two thousand with good stores and schools and plenty of amusements. Ninna had very readily made friends. She had joined the Methodist church, not that conscience had prompted any such action, but because it was a good place to meet other young folk.

She had, in addition to that delicate beauty of hers, a gift for ready conversation. She radiated merriment and exuberant spirit and was clever in a superficial way—which is after all the only way one may be clever and retain popularity. Ninna was so clever that had it depended on her

stupidity to be a favorite, she would immediately have become as dull as good Queen Anne. She soon made her parents see, therefore, that it was not right nor befitting that their priceless gem should languish in shabby surroundings. As soon as her father made the last payment on the farm, he gave his consent to the refurnishing of the house, and to every other whim of Ninna's he possibly could meet.

Elizabeth was getting on nicely, she wrote. Her wages were now rather above the average for those days and she was studying at night with Fru Haldora. Her parents thought they might well dispense with worry concerning her, but both felt a vague uneasiness about Ninna. They hardly knew what to do for nor expect of this surprisingly lovely child which had been given them. They felt that she was not meant for the world to which they had been born. Yet knowing nothing of any other mode of existence, they were as helpless as the proverbial hen with her gosling. Anything then they could do to please her, to make the commonness of their ways less trying to her budding ambition for refinement, they gladly consented to do.

It was something of a shock therefore to Mrs. Lindal when her daughter told her one morning that she had made up her mind to go to work.

"Why, darling, aren't you happy here? What in the world would you do? Where would you go?" she asked.

"Oh, don't get flustered," Ninna answered, buttering her toast leisurely, "I'm not going far. I'm just going to work in Doctor Whitman's office."

"When did you see him? Why haven't you told us this before?"

"I haven't see him. I only made up my mind this morning. Lottie Cunningham told me last night at the Young People's Society what a lot of business he has. . . . He needs an office girl."

"If you haven't seen him, how can you be so sure of getting the place?" her mother questioned, amazed. "How

do you suppose you'll like such long walks in the winter? Oh, Ninna, you are such a headstrong child!"

"Give me another cup of coffee, please, mother. Oh, well, how do I know—I always get what I want, don't I?" She smiled her sweetest as she took the cup from her mother's hand. "As for walking I'll not need to. There's always someone coming out this way—or I could get a pony to ride. Papa wouldn't mind feeding one for me."

Mrs. Lindal sighed and brushed the crumbs from the cloth. "I suppose you do get your way, Ninna. But I'm often afraid that you may some day miss the gold of life by chasing the tinsel."

"Now, mamma, don't start that 'All is not gold that glitters' stuff. It's bad enough to hear it in church. Besides if I like to glitter, blame it on my red hair. I'm sorry I can't help you with the dishes this morning, I'm going to ask papa to let me take Ned to town."

Mrs. Lindal gazed after her daughter as she ran, light and graceful as a bit of thistledown, across the pasture toward the field where her father was plowing for summer fallow. Ninna's little golden head gleamed in the sun. Her fluffy curls flirted with the breeze as she skimmed along, and her unbelievably tiny feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

Mrs. Lindal thought of herself at Ninna's age, trudging down the frozen lake on her sixty mile trip to see her dying mother. The lines about her mouth hardened. It is good, no doubt, that youth should be carefree and glad. But how strangely are things divided in this world! She wondered if, after all, some were not destined irrevocably for one scale and others for another. To be a butterfly one must have wings, to be a toiler a stout heart and a strong arm. "How I should miss Elizabeth," she said out loud, "if it were not for Thor."

And Thor, for whom she planned so bright a future, for whom she dreamed and prayed, was all things unto her.

Between those two was the rarest and loveliest bond of life—the deep love and admiration of a son for his mother and of the mother for her son. Not that purely primitive affection which springs from natural relationship, but that more satisfying and elastic bond of mental congeniality and understanding.

Thor at fifteen was the usual gawky long-legged boy; he was no paragon of virtue. His temper was hot and flaring and many a time his dark eyes were unnecessarily black. He had the same tawny colored hair as his father and there was something unusual in the lift of his head—a fearlessness and an unconscious pride. But, though he loved with all a healthy boy's usual fervor every sport which he could take part in, he loved too his books. And, as he had done since childhood, he read the most of them for his parents.

The long winter evenings, with Ninna away at some party, and Bjorn gone to his bed, were brightened for Mrs. Lindal while she sewed or patched by Thor's eager voice reading some story.

Ninna returned to the house and went upstairs to her room. Mrs. Lindal heard her moving about humming a catchy tune and after a little while she came downstairs dressed in a freshly ironed frock which billowed about her dainty form as if it prided in such a charming duty.

"Don't expect me for supper, mother. I'll likely run over to the Cunninghams. Lottie has some new songs and a few young folks are coming over in the evening. Oh, yes, I have my coat, and I won't walk in any water, and I won't sit in a draft, and I'll not let the dew catch me napping on the ground," she hushed her mother's admonition, kissed her quickly on one ear, and ran out waving a frivolous hand. "Here's where I get the best of the doctor, mother. By, by, dear, don't work too hard!"

It was nearly six o'clock and Mrs. Lindal had her table set for supper in the large cheerful kitchen when Thor came rushing in like a young tornado. He caught his

mother around the waist, dancing her wildly about the room.

"Mamma, the teacher thinks I will get through both my grades this term. Gee whiz, that will put me into Winnipeg in the fall. How's that, mamma, a son in college at sixteen. Gosh, I'll be a doctor before you know it." He gave a final whirl to his laughing mother, hugged her with all his awkward strength and then paraded the length of the room in all the various ways of exaggerated dignity. He was Doctor this and Doctor that, and bowed and smirked or strolled in supercilious splendor. Then suddenly he became just a hungry boy:

"Gee, mamma, I'm starved. What's that smells so good? M-m, pie. Oh, you darling. Oh, my goodness, here's a letter from Elizabeth! I forgot it."

"Why Thor, give it me. Now you call papa, he's in the carriage room, and while you wash I'll read what she has to say."

Over the supper table she told her men folk the news in Elizabeth's letter. "Elizabeth won't be out next month for her holiday as she thought. She's going to wait until Baldar can come, then the both of them will be out for two or three weeks."

"Whoopee!" Thor expressed his delight as he threw a piece of meat at the cat's eye.

"Thor, haven't I told you not to feed the cat at the table," his father chided him.

"Listen now, papa," Borga went on, "Miss Olson thinks that our Elizabeth should take up designing. It's interesting and profitable work, but the poor child says it will likely be a long time before she can earn enough to do such a thing. Sometimes it seems to me, papa, as if we had done nothing at all for her and yet what a sweet unselfish girl she is—you know, too, what a help she was on the farm."

"Well, rather," Thor interrupted, "not much like Miss Redhead, always gadding about with the fellows in town."

Bjorn scowled at his son but Borga swept on quickly, "Hush, Thor; don't talk that way of your sister. Still, papa, you must admit Ninna is no earthly help to me and that she is just a little selfish in her ways. I declare I don't see why you let her do everything she has a mind to."

"Well, now, mamma, why don't you forbid it? What can I do with a bit of a baby like that?" he excused himself, grinning broadly.

"Oh; I suppose you're right, but with you on her side much good my talking is. She simply doesn't listen. If I only could believe her serious in wanting to go to work, I might hope that something to keep her busy would settle her mind. But it's just another piece of mischief, I'm afraid."

"Sure as soup! All the girls are crazy about that new doctor. He's a handsome guy. I'll bet Ninna thinks she'll nab him," Thor informed his horrified parents.

"Oh, Thor!" His mother was distressed, then to her husband, "there, you see! All this may be nonsense, but how must those girls carry on if the very boys in school talk of them like that."

Bjorn squirmed in his seat. "Now, now, mamma, don't get upset. You and I are a bit oldfashioned maybe. The youngsters do a deal of cutting up these days—because there's nothing for them to do I guess. But it's all harmless. Besides," he laughed, "Ninna's a sharp little miss and you know it."

"That's just it," Borga snapped a little crossly, "sharp and selfish. A pretty character to develop, I must say!"

Seeing the flush on his wife's round cheek Bjorn hastened to change the subject. "But how's our Balder getting on? Has he been down to see his mother lately?"

"He is simply wonderful, Elizabeth says, and his music teacher tells him he will now have to go to some Eastern centre if he wants to get a proper chance. As for poor Mrs. Fjalsted, she's very calm and quiet now. He was

down for a few days while the theatre was closed for renovation. It's likely she's getting over the melancholia and Miss Thompson is still as faithful to her as ever."

"They sure were lucky to get her," Bjorn remarked, helping himself to another cut of cake and passing the dish to Thor. "It's like a mother she's been all these years to that poor woman. And does he say anything of Loki?"

"Not much. Just that he's working hard and that he's aged a lot. Poor man! A lonely life he's had—a bitter payment for his hardness."

After supper, while he wiped the dishes, Thor told his mother all the day's doings. How this one made a silly muddle of his lessons and what a joke it had been, and how a chap had made a great run at ball in recess, and every other piece of news he considered interesting. When the dishes were put away and Borga was settled in her corner nearest the light with a pile of socks to darn, and Bjorn was settled in lazy comfort in his wide old chair, with the evening paper, Thor pulled out the book he was reading in snatches between study time and chores for his mother. It was the "Idylls of the King."

"Let's see, where were we, mamma?"

"We were just at the place where Lancelot goes disguised to King Arthur's lists to battle for the great diamond."

"Gee, some fighters they had in those days! I guess even Sigurd the Volsung was not greater than he."

"No, dear, I s'pose not. But don't forget all these stories are typical of the ideals in those days rather than stories of actual fact."

"Sure, I know, but someone must have been like that or no one would have written like this. Oh, mamma, why isn't there anything wonderful for us to do to-day?"

"Why, Thor! Isn't there much more for us to do to-day, child, with all our opportunities? Things were not so pleasant nor altogether noble in those other days, for all

these rosy tales. But read, dear. It will soon be time for you to get at your home work."

"Oh, mamma, it's stupid and dull now! And every day is just the same as the one before. Gosh! Think how the Vikings died, mamma, with their big ships burned at sea! I hope when I die it'll be fall, for then the woods are all in color like a flame. Haven't you thought of that, mamma? The summer dies like a sea king in a flame of red and yellow." Thor's dark eyes sparkled and his young face wore an expression both eager and wistful.

While he read, his mother thought less of Elaine than she did of these strange fancies of her son. What a boy he always had been for quaint ideas! There was a warm contentment in her soul. A certainty that this boy for whom she worked and planned, would tread a sure and destined path. And like Mary, the Mother, she pondered, keeping all these things in her heart.

CHAPTER XVII

NINNA MAKES UP HER MIND

But some will spend, and some will spare
An' wilfu' folk maun hae their will;
Syne as ye brew, my maiden fair,
Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill.

—Burns.

When Ninna entered the town, driving slowly up the main street in her father's trim, new buggy, behind the sleek and spirited Ned, the sun was pouring down in prodigal splendor upon the dusty street and it was already insufferably hot. But Ninna looked as cool as a woodland sprite; her small oval face was innocent of moisture; her golden hair was fluffy as ever and even the stiffness of her frock was scarcely lessened. There are occasional beings as fortunate as she in the world.

Without excitement or trepidation, she drew rein before the doctor's neat doorway, fastened the weight to Ned's tossing head and went in. There was no one in the outer office, but she heard a deep full voice giving advice to someone in the inner sanctum. Ninna settled herself calmly in a chair; took off her hat; ran her dainty fingers through her hair; wiped her little nose with a bit of chamois, and giving a flip to her frills, prepared to await the doctor.

After a very little while the door of the secret chamber opened and a big-eyed, frightened looking young woman came out. Close upon her heels Doctor Whitman followed. He was a brown-haired, brown-eyed young man, solidly knit as to frame and wholesome—with that immaculate look

about him to which, somehow, only a doctor seems capable of attaining.

Ninna gave him the full benefit of her smile, which is a mild explanation of the witchery of her act. Some men are made for warfare. Some women are born to destroy. Wherever Ninna entered peace spread her wings and soared away.

Doctor Whitman stared at his visitor helplessly. This tiny Dresden goddess could not be real! Good Lord, he thought, what can she want! Ninna smiled again and Doctor Whitman was at her mercy forever.

On either side her full red lips were two deep dimples, those dangerous cups of laughter in which all conceits may sleep, situated as never before such charms have been. They served a double purpose. To draw the unwary eye down from the soft round cheek to the pouting scarlet lips and to release them charmed again from the contemplation of those alluring lips, edge him on to yet other fields. To Ninna, with her inborn artifice and her outward guilelessness, was granted the power to exact from everyone not only admiration but service. This little cherub with the gold-brown eyes was as destructive to tranquillity as a whirlwind.

"How do you do, Doctor Whitman?"

The poor young man flushed and remembered his manners and his professional dignity——,

"Er, ah—to be sure—fine day, isn't it?—Miss—Miss——"

"Lindal," Ninna's honied voice helped him.

"Oh, yes, Miss Lindal, well, what can I do for you?"

"Oh, Doctor Whitman, *such*, a lot! You haven't an office girl yet, have you?"

"Why, no!" He didn't see the connection but he did think, "What a voice! Dear me, what perfection." He was far from sure that he wasn't having an attack of sun-stroke and a wild delusion. Such things didn't happen in country towns!

"That's fine!" Ninna told him, "just lovely! For, you see, I've come to take the place!"

"The place! Take the place! What place?" he asked dazedly.

"Why, the place of office girl. I'm tired to death of doing nothing. And you can't expect me to stay on the farm, now can you?"

"*Certainly not!* Of course not!" Doctor Whitman saw that such an idea was absurd, but he still didn't quite see what his office had to do with it.

Then like a lightning stroke it came home to him. This beautiful bit of femininity wanted to be his office girl—had decided to be just that! This amazing being was to face him daily in his dingy office and usher in and out the sick and the lame, the bruised and the broken wreckage that drifted to his doors. It seemed utterly ridiculous and then all at once it became his own desire. Why, the whole office would be dismal after she left! How on earth would he be able to endure the whines and whimpers of humanity, not to mention their ugly diseases and gloomy faces, if this fairy goddess vanished away into thin air?

"That would be delightful, Miss Lindal! Really, I can't say how lucky I feel. However did you think of coming?"

"I'm glad you like me, Doctor Whitman. Really, I can type quite well. I could do all your letters for you. I've practised a lot with a friend of mine who is a stenographer. But I don't like business. It's so messy and so strewn with papers and fat men that smoke. I don't like fat men!—that is, not greasy ones that puff, you know!" She beamed on him as he laughed appreciatively. "So you see, I heard that you were getting a lot of business. Oh, the people like you immensely! Much better than the last doctor that was here! And so I thought, well, now, he should have an office girl. They all do in the big cities. It looks prosperous and prevents the frightened ones from running out once they're in."

"You seem to have given the matter deep thought," he said. "Really that's quite an idea. I never would have thought of that."

Ninna nodded her head. "I know. Men are too busy with big things to think of these trifles." Something of the serpent's wisdom was surely hers. Doctor Whitman was now convinced that not only was she unbelievably lovely, but modest and wise as well. With a quick bird-like movement she ran to the window, for someone was whistling a popular air outside.

"Take Ned to the stables for me, will you, Edward?" she called to the young man idling without.

"Aren't you coming over for dinner?" Edward Cunningham wanted to know.

"No, not now. Run along, that's a good dear! I'll be over for supper though, surely." She waived her white hand and returned to the doctor. "Well, that's settled. Now I can stay here until twelve or one, just as you say. Be quick," she urged, "go into the other room and be busy. I see an old lady coming. They like busy doctors. It makes them feel as if they were in a popular game to call on one."

As he fled obediently, he heard the vestibule open and then Ninna's sweet voice:

"Oh, Mrs. Gilbert, how ill you *do* look! Sit down, dear! —That's better!—in this nice easy chair. Yes, he's busy just now, writing down a lot of symptoms. He's been that rushed he's afraid he'd forget what's what!"

"*Do* tell!" the old lady puffed; "it's this hot weather, I guess. Not a wink of sleep have I had this past week."

Ninna clicked her tongue sympathetically. "You were wise to come, Mrs. Gilbert. You never can tell what may be wrong. Now, I'll just see if Doctor Whitman is through."

As for Doctor Whitman, he was in another maze of bewilderment. This strategy argued a depth of worldliness

he would not have dreamed of. Ninna tip-toed in smiling angelically.

"Be very doubtful," she told him. "Old Mrs. Gilbert is strong as a horse, but she loves to think she is sick. Make her happy by believing her—she has loads of money!"

"Upon my soul!" he whispered back, "what will become of me if this keeps up!"

"I know almost everyone hereabouts and all their diseases—all those that count anyway, and old Doctor Jordan's getting deaf. If you'll just do as I say, you'll be a great success. Hurry now! rumple your hair, and look worried! Tell her about a lot of terrible sicknesses and charge her two dollars and half instead of two dollars!"

"Good Lord! Well upon my soul!" the poor young man mumbled, clutching his head and incidentally ruffling the neatness of his very decent brown locks.

When he met old Mrs. Gilbert, he was so completely upset that there was no need to strive for a worried air. Worry and Doctor Whitman had joined company and were not soon to part!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE "TOMBOLA"

What is so joyous as a friendly meeting
Where joy and mirth with good content are blest?
—*Old Icelandic Song.*

The Good Templars were giving a Tombola—an entertainment peculiarly Icelandic, where a ticket is given each one upon entrance to the hall which entitles the holder to a prize. This he gets by presenting the ticket to a booth or stage where the prizes are displayed. A dance and sometimes refreshments follow this and it is therefore a popular form of amusement with the young people.

This particular Tombola was given for the benefit of some sick member so the hall was well crowded when the Johnsons and Elizabeth got there. Mrs. Johnson was resplendent in her Sunday silk and Elizabeth was very much aware of her own new dress made by herself in the latest style with the aid of the accomplished Miss Olson.

She had not gone very often to the lodge, though Finna had insisted that she join. She knew, therefore, but a few of the people who were laughing and making merry over the prizes. There was an almost Asiatic bartering going on. The poor men who drew ladies' bedroom slippers or babies' bottles, especially if they were innocent of wife or child, naturally tried to make some improvement in their luck. Small boys ran about wildly to the distress and shame of their parents, and yelled loudly to one another or fought happily over their treasures. With them the spirit of trade was in full flower, and even when they could in no wise

improve their fortunes, they did not hesitate to change as often as might be.

Mrs. Johnson and Elizabeth went together to the booth and Finna was more than a little pleased to draw a brass curtain rod.

"Well, now, isn't that the luck for you! Me that just wanted a pole for Tomi's room. It's tired I am of hanging the curtains on a string! Here Elizabeth, give Mrs. Odson your ticket.— Well, did you ever! She got the ham, did she, Mrs. Odson? Now isn't that the queerest? And her not even thinking of getting married!"

Elizabeth grew very red as the bystanders rocked with laughter. "Well, we can eat it just the same, can't we auntie?" Elizabeth had formed the habit of calling her guardian by this endearment.

"To be sure and we will! It's hoping it's not too salty, I am and that's a fact!"

Tomi came up to them, brought thither by the laughter. He fished into his pocket and gave Mrs. Odson his ticket. There was a general roar from around the booth when, with a merry laugh, she brought him a pair of ladies' silk hose, brilliantly red in color.

"Oh, picture it!" Finna held her sides, "my Tomi with those red stockings! Oh, why isn't my Einar here? It's a sight he should see!"

Poor Tomi held the hose away from him as if he feared bodily contamination.

"Darn it, ma, take them!" said he and bolted.

"Now would you ever!" His mother wiped her^s wet eyes on the red horrors. "It's on me he would put them! Me, a respectable woman and a Good Templar!"

During this entire scene, a tall dignified-looking woman with a rather pale, delicate looking girl at her side, had looked on in mild amusement. Mrs. Johnson with her ready friendliness had noted that she seemed to know very few of those present. As soon as she had disposed of her

prizes on a chair at the back of the room, she returned to this woman.

"Good evening, friend. It's sorry that I am not to remember where I met you. ~~But~~ you know how it is in this world—so much to think of and me with a head so queer-like."

The woman smiled.

"I think it was at the picnic last summer when the Good Templars went to Elm Park. I am Mrs. Hafstein. This is my daughter Margaret."

"Well, and isn't it the truth! You that made the coffee that day and me to forget. Picture it! What a dullness!" Finna looked around for Elizabeth and beckoned to her, where she was talking to another girl from Miss Olson's shop. "This is Margaret Hafstein, Elizabeth, and this," patting Elizabeth fondly upon the arm, "is not my own daughter, worse luck, but the child of my dear Mrs. Lindal, her that lived so long in New Iceland, up along the fjot, but is now getting rich west of here near Caldwood. It's with me she is just now and glad I am to have her. Such a girl with an ambition! It's everything she knows about dead kings and wild people! Such a girl she is to read! It's a serious looking daughter you have, Mrs. Hafstein, and good friends they should be, though my Elizabeth is so much older. A few years, I often say to my Einar, are just like hairs on the head, not to be taken out and counted, and that's the truth!"

Mrs. Hafstein gave Elizabeth her hand and Margaret smiled at her a shy, wistful smile.

"I guess you're right, Mrs. Johnson. Margaret is not very old but she had to learn early that life is sometimes very hard,—though," she added hastily, "I'm not saying we're not happy now."

"Sure, dear Mrs. Hafstein! I understand, and it's not myself that would be taking it amiss though you told me about it. Me, that was flooded out on my farm like my

mother before me, God rest her! It's a hard life it was in the old days—but a grand country after all, so bright-like and noisy—like a fair!"

Mrs. Hafstein laughed. "Yes, that's so. It's strange how there seems to be something here to bind one. I never should have believed it possible, but I don't think I could go away now and not want to come back. It's a fine city, Winnipeg."

Finna beamed. "Isn't it! Such stores with their bargains, and so many pretty lights and the roads all so good and safe and no pumps whatever to make the babies sick. Why, I declare, it's hardly a case of typhus we get now, nor a little white funeral. It's a grand city and that's a fact! And it's ashfelt over the whole place we'll be having some day, my Tomi says—you know, that hard stuff like a rock only smoother! Why, I declare, it's a long time now since I had to watch my rubbers—you know how it was with rubbers in the muddy days. It's even the mud here has a love for me, I used to tell my Einar, it sticks so!"

They chatted away and every so often some one came up to the genial Finna for a word and a joke. The program committee had arranged for coffee and cake after which the floor was to be waxed and the dance begin. Those who did not wish to remain as spectators or to take part in the dance might then leave at their own pleasure. When the refreshments were being passed, a stout well dressed man came up to Mrs. Hafstein and sat down.

"Mrs. Johnson, let me introduce Mr. Olafson from Argyle. I was housekeeper for him once for two years."

Mr. Olafson gave Finna a firm friendly hand. "Yes, and it's a housekeeper she is going to be again for the rest of her life, eh, my dear?" said he, chuckling at his own wit.

Mrs. Hafstein flushed a deep crimson, but Finna lifted her hands in pleased amazement. "Well, well, now isn't that the good luck for you! A good housekeeper she is Mr. Olafson, that I can see. It's on a woman I can tell it every

time—yes, and what's more my Einar agrees with me. And you such a good man for a widow woman, to split the wood and mind the fire. It's a blessing a good man is, especially in the cold weather, and that's a fact! Is it in Argyle you will be living, may I ask?"

"Well, no, I guess not. You see I've done rather well," Mr. Olafson told her modestly, "and Mrs. Hafstein wants her girl to go to school. I'm thinking to live in Winnipeg and rent my farm for a few years. A little rest won't hurt me."

"If that isn't the best of all! Why it's better than a Tombola this news is. It's right glad I am that I paid my twenty-five cents to come. Just like a story book, so it is, and like I tell my Einar there's no need to look in books for surprises, the back yard, so to speak, you understand, is full of them."

After the coffee was served, Mr. Olafson and his future bride went home taking Margaret with them. Finna hunted up her Tomi and found him playing whist in a corner with some other lads.

"Is it for the dance you're staying, or are you coming home with your mother?" she asked.

"Are you alone?" he queried cleverly, wanting to know what Elizabeth was going to do.

"No, it's not about me you need worry, my dear. Elizabeth is coming with me. It's a bit of coffee I want to have ready for Balder when he comes home, poor lad."

"Oh, I guess I might as well come too," her son replied indifferently, secretly thinking that he might as well have the pleasure of watching the joy in Elizabeth's face while she listened to Balder's confidences. He was not so blind that he had not long ago realized that for Elizabeth the sun rose and set on the young violinist. Sometimes he longed to bang Balder's musical head against something sufficiently hard to knock a little light into his blinded eyes. For, of

course, Tomi knew nothing of the golden vision that hung like a cloud over Balder's romantic mind.

To Tomi the way home was all too short. It was so seldom that he could enjoy so much of Elizabeth to himself. She was such a busy little person, with her three nights a week at Fru Haldora's and with mending, or ironing, or a funny little wash to do on the other evenings. There was only that wonderful Saturday night, but even then Balder came home with them and on the way to the theatre Elizabeth talked of no one else.

Now with her laughing and merry, leaning cosily upon one arm, and his jovial mother clinging closely to the other, he was more than content with life. How strange is the magic of the beloved! The commonest words become beautiful. The most sordid surroundings are illumined with a light "that never was on sea or land."

When they reached home, Mrs. Johnson found that her Einar had built a big fire and set the kettle on before going to his rest. So the first sound which greeted them upon their entrance was the comfortable bubbling and humming of the kettle, and Nigger, the cat, came amiably out into the hall to meet them, as eager as his age and dignity would permit. He rubbed a fat side against Finna's feet while she stopped to hang her coat up.

"Well, well, the poor kitty! Picture what a love she has for me! I declare it's a shame they put on us sometimes, the poor creatures. Come, pussy, pussy, it's a drop of cream you'll get. Such a good cat and no mice to worry me, and that's the truth!"

Balder came home after a short while tired and gaunt. In the coziness of the clean kitchen where he flung himself into a chair, he seemed to the watchful Elizabeth thinner and more weary than ever. Tomi was cutting kindling for the morning and as the women brought cups and dishes, rusks, cream and sugar, they told Balder all about the Tombola. He laughed at Finna's absurdities and Elizabeth's

descriptions, for though she was grave and quiet in public, she was gay enough at home and had a gift for mimicry. But they saw that he forced his interest, nevertheless.

"You're working too hard, Balder. I wish you would rest more," Elizabeth said, becoming suddenly grave.

"Work! What else can I do? But it's not work worries me. It's lack of it. The professor told me this afternoon that he would teach me no more. That I'd have to go east, and I'm just wondering how to manage it."

"Why, Balder, that means you've gone to the very top here!"

"My goodness, what a smartness! What will your dear Fru Haldora think now?" Finna fluttered about the table excitedly. "I declare I never saw such young ones as I have here. It's famous you'll be dearie, and maybe take your old Finna to a box in a theatre."

Balder caught her about the waist, kissing her frank old face. "Why, auntie, there's nothing I could ever do to repay you. When I'm very famous and swelled up like this"—he threw out his chest and lifted his head in the air—"why, a big gold pin you'll have for your hair and a fine dress with yards and yards of ruffles on it, and the very first seat in the very best box when your Balder plays *his own music*."

"Mercy on us! Just picture it, Elizabeth! But lad, it's thin you are, and so little that you'll eat. Have a glass of milk before you go to bed. Do, dearie." Finna sighed and shoved the cat away gently as it got into her path and hurried to the stove for the coffee pot.

"How's the show this week?" Tomi asked. "I hope it's better than it was last week."

"It's fine! Splendid piece! And the leading lady acts well. She's about the prettiest girl I've ever seen," he made a deep bow and blew a kiss to the imaginary damsel.

"Oh, she can't be prettier than the one who played Isabel in East Lynne," Elizabeth was doubtful and curious.

"That colorless blonde?" Why, my dear Elizabeth, even you are prettier than she! But this lady—just wait till you see her! Such daintiness and such hair. Like bright gold!" Balder laid his hand on his heart and shuddered deliciously.

Elizabeth laughed gaily but her face flushed in a sudden wave of pink. It was not the first time Balder's personal remarks had wounded her. Their very innocence, their very carelessness, made them more deadly. It was so plain that in her, who hoped and dreamed and prayed for him, he had discovered no special charm; none of that beauty to which he was unconscious slave. She might read herself blind on the lives of his favorite composers that she might have something in common to talk of and to share with him; she might be ever ready to hear and sympathize with his difficulties, which were many; to bear with his darker moods when disappointments and jealousies made him miserable; but in spite of this, she was only Elizabeth—just as Finna was only Finna.

All the happiness of the day was wiped out and all her foolish pleasure in waiting for him was ended. But she kept up her chatter and only Tomi, whose eyes were made keen by his own worship, saw with bitterness that sudden flood of color—the quick drooping of fringed lids over pained eyes, and the settling of her mobile mouth into a straight line.

"Say, Elizabeth," Balder called to her, when he passed her room later on going to bed, "I've two tickets for the excursion boat on Sunday. Let's take our lunch and run away for the day. And say, I guess I can go with you on that vacation in a couple of weeks now."

"Oh, Balder, won't that be lovely!" Elizabeth opened the door a discreet distance and stuck out her head with its wealth of brown hair hanging loose about her. Her dark rose dressing jacket, opening low at the throat revealed a chaste beauty that her stiff tailored blouses never suggested. And her great violet eyes were sparkling with renewed hope.

For a moment she stood revealed in the light of the hall as one in a spotlight, and for the second time in his life Balder became acutely aware that this girl whom he took for granted was undoubtedly lovely.

"If she only wasn't such an old maid," he thought, "so prim, so perfect. Good heavens! She's as old in her calm way as Finna." He paused and scowled at her. Then, crossing the little space between them swiftly, kissed her eager upturned face. With something of that deviltry which had characterized his father, he laughed at her confusion, watching the hot waves chase in swift succession across her white face.

Elizabeth was wordless with astonishment and conscious in a panicky way of her beating heart. She wondered if he heard it too. Still laughing, he re-crossed to his room; at the door he made a mocking bow. "That for your charms, my dear."

Poor, foolish Elizabeth stole to her mirror like a thief to his treasure. This new Elizabeth that had pleased him, what was she like? But that mental vision, which blinded her to her own radiance, revealed only a dark, regular-featured face with mocking black eyes whose merriment somehow hung about her like a suffering mist. Poor simple heart! Elizabeth could not believe but that the miracle had happened. She must mean something to him after all! Some natures are capable of only a single affection. It is impossible for them to understand the vagaries of a romantic mind. She knew very little as yet of the ways of the world. She had been too content just to live close to her idolized Balder, to study and to work and to build her little air castles.

Deep waters need the stress of storms to stir their level and to prevent their stagnation. Deep natures sometimes require a typhoon of distress to awaken and bring out their latent power. Elizabeth lay awake far into the night scarcely

daring to believe the sweet hope within her, and yet believing it a wicked reflection to doubt him.

As for Balder, he shrugged his shoulders, mentally calling himself a fool. "Oh, well, Elizabeth would understand." They had always been like brother and sister. Yet those flushed cheeks worried him none the less. "Shucks," he thought, "we Icelanders are so old fashioned. What's a kiss or two anyhow. The chaps at the theatre don't make much of such trifles. Beta is too prim, it'll do her good to be shocked." There crossed his mind the fleeting thought, What if someone else took this liberty? Somehow that displeased him in spite of his theory.

He shrugged again, turned out his light and got into bed. "Poor old Elizabeth, she's a nice girl," he said, doubling up his pillow to suit him. "A nice girl," he repeated sleepily—"darn pretty, too." Then almost immediately fell asleep.



CHAPTER XIX

THE AWAKENING OF ELIZABETH

Oh, for the golden, golden wind,
Breaking the buds as it goes,
Breaking the buds,
And bending the grass
And spilling the scent of the rose.

—*T. B. Aldrich.*

Mrs. Lindal and Thor were at the station to meet Elizabeth and Balder. It was a Saturday afternoon and it was therefore possible for them to do so. Bjorn had wanted to come too, but that very morning had stuck a pitchfork into his foot and would consequently be laid up a few days.

Elizabeth was radiant and very lovely, to her mother's eyes at least, when she ran to meet her and was clasped close to Borga's eager breast.

"What a pretty suit, Elizabeth, and what a sweet hat." She held the laughing girl away to enjoy her the better. "And here's Balder! Well, dear lad, you're about the same. A little thinner, perhaps—yes surely, thinner, and maybe—wiser." She smiled up at the tall young man a chummy, comfortable smile, as she shook his strong and beautifully slender hand in her own work-broadened palm.

"Mrs. Lindal, you never grow any older! Why, it seems as if the years take no note of you whatever."

"So—they've made a flatterer of my little Balder. Well, well, a smooth tongue and a wise head is not always to be despised," she mocked him.

Thor had been standing by, a wide grin upon his tanned face, until Elizabeth turned to him impetuously.

"Gee, Beta, you look great! And say that was a rattling story you sent me, that one of Stevenson's I mean. No, papa couldn't come. Hurt his foot this morning. Darn bad, too, but don't tell mamma," he whispered.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! But where is Ninna?"

Thor rolled his eyes and spread wide his hands. The gesture was comic, but eloquent with his opinion of the family beauty.

"As I've written, Ninna is running Doctor Whitman's office now, if you please, and the doctor as well. Incidentally, there's no time to kill the fatted calf for the returning prodigal."

"Oh, Thor, you young scamp!" Elizabeth shook his arm affectionately, "you get more foolish each day. Such letters you've written me! Really they were better than a comic opera."

"Keep it dark, Beta dear! It's my one sin. Gee whiz, mamma, are you going to keep Balder to yourself all the time?" he demanded, wheeling about towards them.

Thor was a big youth for his years, lanky and just at that distressing age when to a boy's horror the fuzz will show upon his guileless face. He plumped Balder's hand up and down with surprising vigor. "Say!" Balder gave the exuberant boy a friendly shove. "What are you trying to do, wing me? What on earth have you in mind anyway, a world championship?"

Balder became very jolly. And he could be delightfully humorous when he chose. But there was a disappointment behind his merriment. He wanted to ask where Ninna was, but feared to do so. He thought, what if she is away and his heart sank. No, she might be home taking charge of the house while her mother was in town. This unselfishness made her doubly sweet. What was it Mrs. Lindal had

said about Bjorn? Why of course, that was it—she was at home with her father! The dear little ministering angel—he might have known it! A face like Ninna's could mask nothing harsher than a dove's gentleness.

Mrs. Lindal was very garrulous. Why really he had not remembered that she was so talkative. He wished she would address herself to Elizabeth—awful good listener—Elizabeth.

As the buckboard whirled through the town, the fine dapple team shaking their heads and snorting with eagerness, Balder sat in his day dream beside Mrs. Lindal and managed somehow to hear what she said with a fragment of his mind which was not busy with Ninna.

Balder had never before visited the new home of the Lindals. He was agreeably surprised to see how substantial in appearance the white L-shaped house was; how trim Borga's front yard looked and yet how inviting with the afternoon sun smiling down upon her massed flowers, that swayed so sleepily in the soft warm wind. Beneath a sapling oak, a great cluster of four-o'clocks were just opening their golden-lidded eyes, and up against the front wall of the house the paper-fragile hollyhocks raised their pink and scarlet heads. At the back, beyond a large vegetable garden, the red barn resplendent in gleaming fresh paint, told of the prosperity of the farm better than could the comfortable old house.

"Why you have a charming place here, Mrs. Lindal. You were indeed lucky to get it."

"Yes, that we were. Bjorn has done fairly well these last two years. He added another quarter last winter and wants to get more hayland this year if the crop is good."

They arrived at the house and Borga told Thor to take the restless team to the barn. "Be sure to water them before you turn them into the pasture," she reminded him.

Bjorn came limping out into the doorway. "Now, now, it's good to see the children, isn't it, mamma?" He shook

Balder's hand warmly, at the same time drawing Elizabeth close with his free hand.

"What a shame you should be hurt just when I'm coming home."

"That's so," Balder added, "you'll not be able to jig to my tunes now."

Bjorn laughed. "It's good fortune I call it. Now I can be as lazy as I like. It's lucky too that I have a good hired man. And if I can't jig to your tunes, my lad, I can at least wag my head like a mild old man should."

Elizabeth was delighted with the new furniture. The large diningroom was full of sunlight, and her mother's plants filled the window, adding color and cheerfulness. The sideboard was plain but of good workmanship and the chairs were wide and comfortable. She ran about the place gleefully admiring her mother's new stove with the big handy reservoir, or wondering silently whether papa really should have spent so much on the big chairs and the leather lounge in the parlor. She knew from Thor's letters what a time Ninna had led her parents until they bought these things to suit her. The carpet too, seemed to the conservative Elizabeth, a useless luxury on a farm where so much mud is always tracked in. But she was pleased and proud nevertheless, and could see that her mother also took a childish delight in these possessions which she had waited so long to obtain.

While she helped her mother with the supper which progressed somewhat slowly, for there was so much to talk of, Bjorn insisted on hobbling out to the fields and the barn to show Balder the pigs and the calves and the stock which doubtless would be drifting home from the meadow.

Meanwhile Elizabeth was telling her mother, bright-eyed and with undue excitement, of Balder's marvelous advance in music, and how he was saving his money for the last desired honors. Borga glanced sharply at her daughter's face, thinking: "How young she is, how she still plays at

her hero worship. Oh, well, it's like the measles—bound to break out sooner or later and leave her cured of this nonsense."

The front door opened and the clear tones of Ninna's laughter reached them. Elizabeth ran into the hall. Her sister was waving a careless hand to a dark-eyed man who sat disconsolate in his dusty buggy.

"Oh, Miss Lindal," he was saying, "don't be so hard-hearted. Do come! It's not often I can get away for a jaunt." But Ninna only laughed.

"Get along now, doctor dear, do! Go home and get a good sleep! Remember to-morrow is a hard day for you, with those patients coming to get their wounds dressed."

"Oh, damn the patients!" Dr. Whitman struck his sleepy mare a wicked crack with the whip and vanished in a cloud of dust.

Ninna turned about slowly. "Well, my dear," said she to the waiting Elizabeth, "how do you like him? He seemed to paralyze you."

"Why, how should I know," Elizabeth replied, feeling the resentment which her sister always awakened in her, "I never saw the man before. Why didn't you ask him in to supper?"

"And spoil the home-coming for the illustrious Balder?" Ninna made a grimace. "Besides, papa would be poor if I fed all the stray creatures that bring me to the door. But this is not the way for the loving Lindals to meet. Come, honey, give your wicked, wicked Ninna a kiss!"

Elizabeth had to laugh at the pathetic face Ninna managed to make—anyway it was always the same. Those smiles and dimples dispelled all anger.

Ninna turned Elizabeth about and with her head on one side considered the improvement. "You do look better, Beta, but still why so plastered and so plain?" She lifted impudent hands to Elizabeth's hair and pulled the smooth strands forward and over the ears. "Now go take a look at

yourself, Miss Prim. You'd be pretty, dearie, if you knew how to fix up the tiniest bit!"

"Some folks have other things to do beside primping!" Elizabeth retorted, quick anger dyeing her face in spite of her resolved control. Ninna shrugged and danced toward the kitchen.

"More fool they!" she answered.

The table was set and the two russet-gold fowl lay wreathed in a fragrant cloud before Bjorn's plate when he returned to the house with Balder and Thor.

"Be quick, papa, and wash," Borga admonished, "so the chickens won't get too cold."

Balder shot a hurried glance about the room. "Where was she?" he wondered. Borga motioned him to his place telling him not to stand on ceremony, and just as he was about to sit down, Ninna made her dramatic entrance.

Balder's heart took a horrible tumble. Why, she was ten times more beautiful than all his dreams! He stood spell-bound, staring at her, where for a moment she poised in the diningroom doorway well aware of the sensation she was causing.

Ninna was one of those women to the manner born. She was never self conscious, yet always had herself in mind. And in this she was a consummate artist, that wherever there was the slightest possibility of making a favorable impression, she had the readiness to do so without apparent effort. She had taken time to slip into a freshly laundered dress of a delicate blue shade, a color few can wear without injury to complexion and stature. Above it the lovely white of her throat showed round and firm and her little head tilted slightly to the side in natural coquetry, might have been some golden summer flower tipped above a milky stalk. Ninna's eyes had never been more like deep amber than at that moment when, with the light from the window falling directly upon her, she lifted them in challenge to Balder's face.

"You don't seem overjoyed at seeing poor little me," she taunted him. Then with the quick, graceful movements which were not the least of her charms, she slipped to his side, giving him her tiny soft hand.

Borga had stood looking upon this little tableau with disapproving eyes. She knew well enough that Ninna had planned this beforehand. It displeased her to find that even with so old a friend, Ninna could not help playing a part.

But it was Elizabeth who saw with bitterness the light which had leaped into Balder's eyes when Ninna entered, and also marked the confusion of his manner. Balder was like one dazed. He had the detached air of a sleep walker. He was in this world of gossiping people, yet removed from it. Bjorn Lindal had to ask him three times if he would have a drumstick or a piece of breast.

Elizabeth, watching him covertly, felt as if she were about to be ill. Everything to which she had clung for so many years seemed about to slip from her. She shot a look at the glowing Ninna and became possessed of an unholy hatred of her. This little sister whose first toddling steps she had guided, was tearing down her house of cards revealing its emptiness. Until now she had been content with its fragile shell, but now she felt that her girlish dreams were being threatened by a force she could not combat.

But Ninna, daintily picking at her food, watched Balder's dark sensitive face from under the shelter of her sleepy-lidded eyes and was well satisfied with what she saw. "He's going to be very distinguished looking—is now, except for his shabbiness," she thought. His broad forehead, with the great black eyes set somewhat widely apart below it, would have made him unusual in appearance even if he had not been favored with a high-ridged, straight nose, and a mouth both sensitive and beautiful. He was still very dark of skin and his thick black hair clung closely to his head. All this Ninna observed and understood also quite well the strained

silence which bound him. "Well, he'll be a good change, anyway," thought she, "the young men of the town are becoming tiresome," and Doctor Whitman was getting a little beyond her.

She had not reckoned on Thor. With instinctive penetration into what he would have called a "put-up-job," he gave his sister an impudent glance and said, when she asked him for the salt:

"So you've made up your mind to hook Balder, have you, same as the other poor simpletons in town?"

The attack was so unexpected that Ninna had the unaccustomed grace to blush. This Balder saw for he had cast her a swift, sympathetic look when her brother made his rude remark. Ninna kicked Thor with an avenging foot, but turned a sweet, guileless face to Balder.

"As if I expected to make *any* impression upon Balder, who must see so many pretty girls in Winnipeg."

"Oh, they're not so exceedingly wonderful, Ninna," said he, now somewhat recovered from his numbing fascination and resolved upon befriending this much misunderstood girl. He recalled wrathfully how Thor had always tormented her.

Bjorn, as usual, glared at his son, who in turn scowled at his plate. But for once Borga forgot to play peacemaker. It may be that subconsciously she understood the reason for Elizabeth's downcast air, or again, it may have been because Ninna on a Saturday night chose to dress herself in a second befrilled frock—which of course would not do for the Sunday following, and her mother had just that morning finished ironing an appalling number of waists and skirts and petticoats. At any rate, Borga said in a voice so cutting and cold that her husband was amazed:

"Was it necessary for you, Ninna, to put on that blue dress? If you run short of dresses before next Saturday, you'll have to do them up yourself—or perhaps get some of your idle friends in town to help you. I'm getting a little tired of your thoughtlessness."

Ninna met her mother's eyes speculatively. She wondered if a few flatteries would pacify her. But something grim about Borga's strong mouth warned her that this was one time when she had best remain silent. She managed however to throw Balder a sad, wistful glance. Such a look as a kitten, chained to a cruel stake, might cast upon a pitcher of cream just without reach.

Bjorn was troubled. He knew that his wife was not a quarrelsome woman. It dawned upon him that Ninna was causing her mother unnecessary labor and yet did nothing to relieve the work in any way whatever. He had always before thought of Borga's remonstrances as moral reproaches upon the flightiness of their daughter and not as sensible reprimands for neglected duty. He saw, too, that Borga looked tired—she was not as young as she had been. He suddenly felt a great compassion for this faithful wife whose life had been so full of toil and little else. "I'll speak to the silly child myself," he promised himself. "It's not right she should let her mother stand at the ironing these hot days."

Borga was ashamed of herself as soon as the words had escaped her. Yet she did not regret them except that she hated to displease Bjorn and to appear discourteous to her company. She looked toward him apologetically as she handed him his coffee, and was rewarded with an affectionate smile.

After that things went on smoothly. Bjorn talked well and entertainingly and sometimes even the shy hired man, who was always terrified in Ninna's presence, essayed to make some remark about happenings in the town or upon the neighboring farms.

"We had a letter yesterday from Icelandic River," Borga informed Elizabeth. "Runa Peterson has another fine baby now and her sister Caroline is to be married next week."

"Goodness me, mamma, she's not as old as Ninna, is she?"

"No, she's only eighteen, if I remember rightly. She's marrying the man who bought our farm."

"Yes," Ninna put in drily, "she seems to like them well seasoned. He is at least forty."

"Oh, Ninna, impossible! It's like marrying one's father!"

"Well, some girls need a father's strong hand, I reckon," said Bjorn. "But let the poor child be. It's her own affair. I don't like these criticisms."

"All I can remember of Caroline is that she was forever chewing raw carrots," Balder told them laughingly, "and I think she has a snub nose."

"Your memory is better than you appreciate," Ninna giggled as they arose from the table. "Come outside, Balder, and I'll show you my petunias. They smell so sweet this time of day."

"Yes, run into the garden, Maud," Thor hissed after her from the hallway, "and let Beta do the dishes."

When, as Thor predicted, Elizabeth had helped her mother, not only do the dishes, but separate the milk and put it away, she slipped upstairs to tidy her hair and put a fresh collar on her severe dark blouse. Thor was busy with his books, for it was the last week of school; and her mother was setting a biscuit dough for the morning when she came down again, so she slipped out quietly into the cool of the garden.

There was to the left of the house, beyond the flower beds, a clump of cottonwood trees which the former owner of the farm had planted experimentally and which had attained surprising growth. They were shooting up straight and symmetrical, giving every promise of a sturdy and noble old age. There was also a scattering of shrubs—willows, saskatoons, and wild roses. Some planted by Borga and others that had been there before her coming. There was therefore, in addition to the beauties of flowers and grass, the charm which the variegated greens of trees lend to a landscape. For each tree almost has its own shading and

every species of shrub is different in color from all others. Elizabeth saw that the garden was empty of life, except where a fat robin pecked somewhat idly at the rich black earth beneath the hollyhocks. Somewhere in the shrubbery a meadowlark shrilled forth his evensong. And somewhere, away off over the fields, another joined him. The sweet litany seemed to break through the heavy curtain of air, spilling itself in gladness over the whole countryside.

She felt within her a longing to be in harmony with all this calm loveliness, yet, somehow, was sad. Something was speaking to her heart. Here only you may dream and be at peace, the silence whispered. But off in the scrub the meadowlark sang lustily of worship and of love.

She had no definite objective, but wandered on towards the cottonwoods. It was not that she heard, but rather that by some subtle inward premonition she sensed the presence of others as soon as she reached the clump of trees. A pain, such as she had never dreamt of in her wildest imaginings, gripped her heart.

Ninna sat leaning against the light brown trunk of a young tree, at the further side of the small bluff. Balder lay at her feet. In her hands Ninna had a cluster of petunias and phlox which, in careless vandalism, she was tearing to bits, flinging the torn petals over Balder's dark hair.

"Ninna," she heard him say, and there was in his face a look which is not often surprised upon the face of man, —a gleam which tells of the rare visit of the soul to the windows of its prison-house, "you will not tire to wait for me. I know now that I'll make good. I must. With you in my heart and you in my music, how else could it be."

Elizabeth felt as if someone were choking her. She was not conscious that she was an eavesdropper. She leaned against a friendly tree, staring dully at those two playing life's everlasting comedy. So! She understood now all Balder's abstraction. But, there had been occasions. . . . Why had he taken so much of her time? Why was it always

she whom he called upon to share his troubles? Was she not to be considered at all? She realized now clearly her past blindness. So little did she mean to Balder that he could demand her ministrations as he demanded his daily bread. Elizabeth hated him that moment as she had not thought it possible to hate anyone. And Ninna, Ninna the insincere, the little featherhead—she could have cast her into flames without compunction.

But this emotion passed, and only a nameless pain remained. She crept away and like a wounded thing stole to the room which was hers for the time being. In the seclusion of its friendly walls, she wept and agonized as only a captive of first love can agonize. The sun was forever darkened and life a useless and futile thing! She thought with dull anger, as many a wiser woman has thought before her, were all men blind to everything but physical beauty? "But I'm not so ugly," she wailed to her pillow, "he has said that himself." Then she recalled Ninna's words in the early evening. So! That was it! A frilled frock and a fuzzy head—that was the requisite, the "open sesame" to the manly heart. "Well," Elizabeth told her sobbing self, "he shall never know, nor you, my pretty sister, and—after this I'll travel a gait myself."

This very natural sentiment, a moral stiffening of her backbone, gave her a misty comfort, though to her simple mind it seemed a sinful and horrid resolution. So sinful that it seemed to have the strange sweetness of forbidden fruit.

When it had grown quite dark, she heard them returning to the house, and later her mother's voice called her from the bottom of the stairs. She felt frightened. She wondered how she could ever meet him again. Then with a renewal of agony she saw for the first time that she could not escape him, now nor ever. Was he not one of the family at Finna's? Was he not to be as one of her own family thereafter? She hated Ninna with added animosity when this thought came

home to her. It would have been infinitely easier to lose him to any other girl than Ninna.

Borga mounted the stairs almost noiselessly. She had a curious feeling that something was not well with her daughter. She felt, as she had often felt before, when the children were small, and she had hunted them up in the act of some dangerous mischief, like jumping off the barn or lighting a fire near the hayfield. Mothers have these trouble registers given them by a wise Providence. Elizabeth was hurriedly splashing water over her swollen face when her mother entered.

"Elizabeth, my darling!"

Like a little bird, who, having tried his wings finds them utterly weary and flutters back to his nest, Elizabeth slipped into her mother's close embrace. She fled into that loving haven a little girl for all her twenty-one years, to weep out her delusions and her simple-hearted faith. She emerged from this kind shelter a woman, who had left behind her forever that magic land where only dreams are real.

From downstairs the first bars of the Berceuse floated up to them, soft and immeasurably lovely. Elizabeth straightened and threw up her head. "Mother, if you'll wait until I change my dress, I'll come right down."

"Very well, my daughter." They smiled at each other and Elizabeth went to the clothes closet where she had hung her best dress.

Borga understood, and her throat contracted in sympathetic pain. What was it her Bjorn had said. . . . To sing with an arrow in one's breast. . . . That is the way of our fathers!

"Yes," she nodded to herself, as Elizabeth arranged with unusual care her heavy brown hair, "yes, that is the way of our fathers."

CHAPTER XX

THE TURNING

But woe was mine. No soul can know
The full weight of a lover's woe,
Who has not suffered as did I.
Alack! 'Twere worthier I should die!

—*Lorris and DeMeung.*

The two weeks' vacation was for Elizabeth a seemingly endless period, and but for the reassurance of her mother, it is doubtful if she would have kept up with such smiling grace. To Balder each day was a glittering gem strung upon a heartstring whose phosphorescent glow illumined his whole mind. While Ninna was away at the office, he wandered the fields, helped with the chores or sat off in that little clump of cottonwoods playing his melodies.

Elizabeth dreaded that he would demand her companionship as of old. She did not understand, how even as her heaven-held only one star, so now, too, was Balder conscious only of Ninna, and wrapped within the spell of her weaving like some butterfly in its chrysalis state, asleep in a silky cocoon. In that utter isolation which fancy yields, Balder moved in his self-created Eden and if the serpent tempted his Eve he knew nothing of it.

The only enjoyable part of the visit for Elizabeth was the times when she and Thor either drove about the country together with their mother in the cool of the evening, or else when they two stole off somewhere into the rose-laden woods. Then Thor had opened his heart and confided to her all his aspirations. He was at the delightful age when a chattering

squirrel invites forth all a boy's eagerness and exuberant merriment, and yet where the dusk of gold-powdered skies draws out the hesitating expression of youth's age-old yearning for the golden spurs. Thor was to enter college in the fall. He waved this aside as a mere nothing.

"After that I'm going to the University," he told her one evening. "I want to be a surgeon. Not one of these country doctors, but a real, honest-to-goodness surgeon. I want to be able to take a man all apart and put him together again."

Elizabeth thought this rather a savage ambition, but she was very proud of her brother and resolved to do all she could to make his dreams come true.

This gave her a melancholy comfort. The kind of comfort young grief thrives on and, in spite of itself, derives much satisfaction from. Elizabeth rather liked to picture herself as a self-sacrificing old maid nursing a solitary romance and keeping her dear brother's ship off the shoals. But just then she was very sad about it, weeping many dewy tears over the picture. This is the labyrinth all mankind must wander through. The terrors and sorrows of youth are legion because there is no dividing the real from the imaginary.

To Elizabeth, the burning of a city, or the death of a neighbor would have been a sad misfortune. She would have *said* so! But the wrecking of an air castle—that pretty something which never existed—that was a tragedy too deep for words. So it has always been and so it doubtless always will be. All things are relative. One man's stumbling block is another's stepping stone. What to one would be the sunlight, to yet another may be but a tallow candle.

When the time arrived for Balder and Elizabeth to return to Winnipeg, she was seized anew with a nameless panic. To sit beside him on that thirty mile return trip would be intolerable. How they had talked on the way out! How happy

they had been! He had even admired her new suit and told her how becoming her hat was. Elizabeth felt that she could not endure it; all her being was flooded with a tormenting fear that he would spy out her secret. He, who all through the years had been blind to her admiration and constant services, would now have eyes to see her shame. This fresh terror caused a sleepless night and with a face pale and haggard she slipped into the democrat beside her mother in the morning.

Balder had gone to town earlier with Ninna and met them at the train. When the farewells were over and she sank at last into the seat beside him, she found with a mingling of relief and regret that he had no inclination to talk to her.

As the train sped on mile after mile they sat in a kind of neutral condition. Once Balder came out of his day dream, and catching something of the wistfulness of her profile and seeing her pale, asked if she was cold. She answered gravely that she was not. And neither of them saw anything absurd in the question though the day was sultry and hot.

But one is never satisfied! When they arrived at Mrs. Johnson's welcoming haven, Elizabeth pleaded a sick headache and went to her room but not before that obdurate friend had placed a vinegar and water bandage on her head. This was the way Finna's mother had cured headaches and thus would she do to the end of her days. "And if this doesn't help you, dearie, it's in hot water I'll put your feet though the weather swelter you! It's too much thinking you do, darling. It's not so good for a woman. Bless me, picture it! How could my dear mother have raised ten of us if she'd have been *thinking* of what the job meant. There now, run to your room and it's your Finna will bring you some good coffee by and by."

When she was alone Elizabeth wept long and bitterly that Balder should have ignored her all day, completely forgetting that just the night before her besetting terror had been that he might not do so.

At supper time she came down listless and miserable and learned that just after she had gone upstairs a wire had come for him calling him home. His father had had a stroke of some kind and so he had left on the late afternoon train.

Fianna wiped a moist eye on her apron when she read the telegram to her household. "It's a hard life he's had, poor man. And it's a bad woman I've been in my thoughts of him. . . . And now maybe he's dead, may the good Father forgive me!

"Elizabeth, darling, see a little custard I've made you with vanilla and a whiff of nutmeg, just as you like it." And Elizabeth found to her disgust that she could eat it with very real relish.

CHAPTER XXI

AN END AND A BEGINNING

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

—*Proverbs 25:28.*

The years that brought so many changes to the Lindals and the Johnsons, had not failed to take account of the Fjelstads. Loki Fjelstad had shown a certain noble quality in his patient and persistent labors. After Miss Thompson took charge of his house, with courage and efficiency and apparent satisfaction in so doing, the neighbors began one by one to drop in at the farm. It is true that this was partly curiosity but equally true that there was much of goodfellowship in the act, for most folk are a gregarious lot, seeking association one with another.

Miss Thompson was the soul of hospitality. In the old country she had been from early childhood housemaid for one family or another and had always longed, with that terrible longing of the orphan, for a spot she might call her own. Now she had this happiness. Mr. Fjelstad, like many another rough and uncouth man, had nevertheless deep in his heart a feeling of respect for women. He who had so rudely used the only woman he had ever loved, would never have dreamt of cruelty towards any other. In all things about the house he gave Miss Thompson free rein. As he had nothing adverse to say to the neighbors, they dropped little by little their former attitude of suspicion and were inclined to pity rather than to despise him.

But with the years Loki crept more and more into a

shell of reserve. He, who had defied loneliness and criticism, seemed to crumble fast under pity. Pride is the first primitive raiment, the swaddling clothes of the soul. With it swept away man stands before his Maker knowing his nakedness and ashamed. Pride in his stern will had been Loki's thick garment. But this garment had been wrenched away when he was forced to confess his failure to Sjera Bjarni that long-gone autumn day. Penitence without reconstructive force is a slow death. Nature does not grow roses in the gloom of a sepulchre, neither build character in the constant shadows of morbid remorse.

Loki's neighbors might forget their animosity and his old time churlishness, but there was always one to keep his wound afresh.

Mrs. Fjelstad had become very docile and calm under the tender and sympathetic care of Miss Thompson. As time passed there were periods when she was almost herself—a pathetic childish self, it is true, but with something of her real nature uppermost. Yet, if she crept timidly down the stairs to sit of an afternoon with Miss Thompson in the little re-decorated living room, and Loki happened to come in, she would immediately start up in terror and flee upstairs again. Still sometimes of late if he came in quietly—and he had fallen into the habit of walking almost on tip-toe—he might watch her unnoticed and a few times she had noted and not seemed to mind him. Those were the golden days of his desolate years. But she could never bear the sound of his voice, howsoever hushed; it fell upon her feeble mind like a heavy lash.

So to Loki there was but one objective. He worked at times like a man demented. He denied himself everything. His clothes were the despair of Miss Thompson who tried her best to keep the patches from falling apart.

He had been fortunate with his stock. He had had good teams of oxen and later horses. These he let out in exchange for labor on his farm and so, though working alone, got on

remarkably well. During the winter he had generally fished until this last year when a strange illness had kept him to his bed for a month. Ever since he had been conscious more and more of an increasing shortness of breath, dizziness and weakness. But he would not call a doctor. There was no money for such nonsense. Every cent he could scrape together went into the bank. Some day he intended to see about sending Anna away to be cured. She might look at him then without fear even when he spoke to her. He intended doing this and he was scarcely conscious of the fact that it was a fear of losing her altogether which kept him making excuses for the delay.

He thought seldom, those last years, of Balder. When the boy had started going to school, he had fallen away from that rough fellowship which had sprung up between them in the old days of their isolation. Balder learned quickly that his father was of another world than he. His ideas were shaped in a different forge and never would they travel any but parallel roads with a great gulf fixed between them. Each time Balder came home for a glimpse of the little mother he always loved, he seemed to be even more of a stranger to his father and they had but little to talk of. Loki recognized in his son the fineness and idealism which had been Anna's and felt a little awed.

Miss Thompson had often wiped a sympathetic eye when Balder had played upon his magic violin for his frail little mother with her long fair hair falling about her and with dark puzzled eyes watching her son, for she knew how at such times poor Loki, the exile, crept up to the window where he might see Anna and listen in pathetic reverence to this gifted child who was his and yet somehow so alien.

It was on a Saturday that Loki fainted out in the field where he was cutting early hay. Miss Thompson, seeing the team standing idle in the same spot so long, ran out to the edge of the meadow and found him where he was lying. When he recovered consciousness he told her that he had felt

a peculiar sensation coming on and had gotten down from his mower, but on the way to the house he had been overcome. The frightened woman thought it might have been a sunstroke but Loki had a premonition of the end. He grew steadily worse so Miss Thompson went in all haste to the Petersons to ask for help and to get either Mr. Peterson or Bensí, who was now a great husky young man working the land with his father, to go to Headland and send for a doctor and get a message off to Balder.

But they were too late. When Miss Thompson came back from her errand she was almost overcome by astonishment at the scene which met her eyes. At the foot of the stairs leading down from Anna's little room, Loki was lying just as he had fallen. But his head was in Anna's lap and his face wore an expression of peaceful joy. She was stroking his unkempt hair and slow tears like crystal pearls fell upon him.

"You should not have kept me away from him. He must have been sick a long, long time," she said, looking at Miss Thompson steadily.

And that poor woman who had borne so well the whims and vagaries of her patient in other days, broke down now and wept. She saw that the miracle had occurred. Anna Fjelstad was her normal self again.

Miss Thompson became a bundle of nerves before Balder arrived. It had been so difficult to manage the neighbors. She feared so much that some foolish question on their part might again unsettle the newly righted reason. It had been hard, too, making Anna understand that she had herself been ill a long time and that many changes had come about. As soon as Mrs. Fjelstad realized that her husband was dead, she called for little Balder. Then Miss Thompson went through the ordeal of explaining that there was no longer any small son but instead a wonderful young man with the magic of the gods in his fingers. It was with shak-

ing hands and a rapidly beating heart that she awaited the outcome of his visit.

Mrs. Fjelstad was strangely patient. She had dressed herself in her best and sat in the old reed-bottomed chair beside the kitchen stove. With the capriciousness of Manitoba weather, this day was chill with a drizzling rain though the previous week had been one of intense heat.

Miss Thompson went out to meet Balder when she heard the team coming. Bensi Peterson had gone for him to Headland. She fell upon his neck in a storm of tears which quite frightened him for he had never known the efficient lady to give way to womanly weakness before. Immediately the truth flashed into his mind. "He is dead then, Miss Thompson."

"Yes, dear boy, may God rest him. But it is not that—it is not that! We all have to die sometime. It isn't that!"

Balder suffered a moment of genuine fear. "It isn't mother, is it?" He almost shook Miss Thompson.

"Sh—" she warned him, "now listen! You must forgive me! Sure I've had an awful time these few days past. She's quite herself again!"

And as Balder stared at her incredulously, the tears welled up afresh. "It's true, my boy. Only God knows how it happened. I think she must have been with him when he died," she finished, after telling him of the way she had found them.

Balder forgot all about the parent who lay so still and resigned in the front chamber. Over his whole soul a warm and inexpressibly beautiful gladness gathered. He caught Miss Thompson in an impetuous embrace.

"God bless you! God bless you!" he cried; and ran into the house to his mother.

She came to meet him quietly, gracefully, with calm dignity. Her grave sad eyes swept him from head to foot. This tall stranger was her son! For just a moment her

brows puckered and she hesitated, then smiling, she held out her arms.

"A long sleep I've had, my son . . . but broken always—I think by dreams of you!"

Then they were in each other's arms and Balder knew the sweetness once again of bringing his tears to a mother's comforting breast.

After the funeral Balder went into the affairs of the farm. He found to his surprise that there was a considerable sum of money in the bank under his mother's name. The farm was good and there was much valuable stock. He realized that it was now possible for him to pursue his ambition. He could borrow money from his mother and go east to complete his training. She, with Miss Thompson, could live nicely in some little house in Winnipeg. He decided to ask the advice of his old friend Sjera Bjarni about selling the land. In the meantime his mother might, perhaps, stay on as before at the farm.

So, with death, had Loki squared his accounts, going on with a clean slate.

CHAPTER XXII

LITTLE BROKEN MELODIES

There are two worlds about us,
Two worlds in which we dwell—
Within us and about us—

—*R. H. Stoddard.*

Mrs. Fjelstad did not want to be left on the farm, so Balder appealed to Finna, that friend to every troubled soul, explaining how matters stood. He thought that in a few days he might find suitable rooms for his mother and then Miss Thompson could join her. Mrs. Fjelstad had approved of this plan. She had learned much of him in these few days. It was as if he had been away on a long voyage where he had left as a child and returned a man grown. Balder, too, had learned many things of this new mother whom he had never known before. Altogether the days had been so full of eager questioning and rare discoveries, that the shadow cast by the death of Loki Fjelstad was scarcely perceptible. He was already just a memory, which was perhaps more than he had ever been to them in life.

When these momentous tidings reached Mrs. Johnson through the medium of a letter written to Elizabeth, she was, as might be expected, completely overcome by her emotions.

"God save me! What is it you say, Elizabeth? Is the dear woman recovered again? Oh, picture that, now!" She lifted high her hands sending out a little shower of flour, for she was kneading bread. "And Loki is dead! God

rest his soul, poor man! I declare, Elizabeth, it seems a shame we all had to be so hard on him and he likely not knowing any better. May the good Father forgive him! And us too," she added religiously in after thought.

"What's that! Balder asks would I mind his blessed mother coming here for a while. Well, now! And is that a nice thing to ask of his Finna? Is it now, I ask you, Elizabeth? Me that loves him like my own. With his being always thin and lame and such a maker of tunes."

She sniffed and punched a red fist into the dough disgustedly. "As if he didn't know what a pleasure it would be. Me a woman with such a nice house and a good cook too that needn't be ashamed to set a table for Mrs. Fjelstad—though they do say she had a terrible fine home in the Old Country."

Elizabeth, knowing her old friend well, let her run on and then put in mildly, "Of course, he knows all this, Auntie, and says 'not that I don't know how glad she'll be to do this, but it seems so selfish always to impose upon her.'"

"Impose upon her! And what, may I ask, has his sweet mother coming to visit an old woman like me got to do with such an idea? I declare, it's a queer way of thinking the young folk have these days. Wasn't it my own mother—may God rest her—with ten children to do for who always was the first to help anyone in trouble—not that I'm insinuating Mrs. Fjelstad is a trouble—and if she could do it with such a crowd and a rickety shanty that often enough, she used to say, only God kept from falling down over our ears when we ran about so, why it would be a queer business if I couldn't manage to welcome a few friends."

Einar came home just at this critical period. Finna rushed toward him and to the poor man's utter bewilderment and consternation, flung her floury hands around his neck and burst into tears, her head on his shoulder. It was a difficult situation for both of them. For him who

stood helpless patting his wife's back and for her who, being so much taller, had to stoop considerably to reach the comfort of that male shoulder.

"Now, now, mamma! Is it too hot you've got baking so much this warm weather. Now, now, mamma! It's not like you to be so upset. Maybe it's a headache you have, darling." This was a very long speech for her husband and Finna was deeply touched by it. She straightened up, wiping her red eyes on her apron and beamed on her Einar.

"It's not many like you, Einar, and that's a fact! Elizabeth dear, get him a drop of coffee while I tell him the news. It's not the baking, papa," she went on seating herself beside him, but first carefully covering the bread pan with a sheet and a blanket, "it's a shock I had. A shock, Einar! Anna Fjelstad is all right again . . . just like that! No one knows how, and Loki is dead . . . just like that, too—all at once and no sickness. Though Balder did say he was never well since that bad winter on the water when he went fishing last. Oh, my, it's a queer-ness altogether! Elizabeth, would you mind a drop for me too—there's nothing like coffee my dear mother used to say to steady the nerves. No, dear, no cookies for me, just a mola. Yes, and papa, it's here Balder is bringing his mother for a few days till he gets her a place in town. Think of that! I declare it's like having someone back from the dead. *That's* what upset me so. Just like that the idea got me—Finna; it's like someone right out of the hands of God—like He used to cure them long ago. And it's like I don't know how to be thankful enough for such an honor. You see it, papa, don't you, what I mean?"

Einar always saw what his Finna saw. He nodded now gravely, not exactly getting her meaning but deeply affected by the fervor of her voice and manner.

"Yes, yes, mamma, of course. It's right glad we'll be—I could sleep on the sofa and she could have the room with you."

"Now, do you hear him, Elizabeth? Isn't that the man with a good heart for you? And him that's so particular about his own bed and the sofa so slippery! But it's no more than I expected; he's always like that, is papa. But it won't be necessary, Einar. Elizabeth will take her into her room. It will be nice for them both and then Mrs. Fjelstad won't be disturbed when I get up to cook the early breakfast for you and Tomi."

The day on which the visitors were to arrive found the Johnson home with its best front forward, so to speak, and its mistress decidedly nervous. In the way of the Ice-lander the table was already set for the expected guests and Finna, in her black Sunday dress and stiffly starched apron, sat uneasily in the little parlor with eyes glued to the window and ears heeding each and every sound. Elizabeth had come home early from the shop to be with her. She was trying to read a book, but the letters danced about crazily and all she could think of was the strange new development in the life of Balder. Tomi had done his share by laying off half a day that he might meet the train.

Finna had just run back into the kitchen to add a stick of wood to the fire and to peer into the coffee pot, making sure it was ready to fill with water, when Tomi's deep voice was heard and then the sound of steps on the porch.

Finna and Elizabeth hurried into the hall. Finna had not beheld Anna Fjelstad for years and Elizabeth had no recollection of that one time when she as a child had seen her. They were both surprised on meeting the visitor. The years that had slipped over her had scarcely left their mark. They had expected an old and broken woman; they saw one who seemed hardly middle-aged. There were a few wrinkles in the fine white forehead, as though from much puzzling, and about the sensitive mouth, but this was all. Her yellow hair still made a rich halo about her small face but the big dark eyes were calm now and up from their depths a serene happiness glowed.

Finna was so excited that she knew hardly what to say, so she just held out her arms. And Anna, reading the kindly face, slipped into them, silent also. Then in the way of the Iclander the world over, once his reserve is down, they sobbed on each other's necks, kissed, and petted each other and emerged from his emotional bath entirely satisfied one with the other and sworn to a lasting friendship.

"My son has been telling me all about this second mother of his—the only one so far as truth goes," Anna said, smilingly, as she followed Finna into the front room.

"Now, hear the woman! It's a poor mother he's had then, the dear lad—me that the Lord dared give only one chick to. Now that's right, Balder, take your mother's hat and coat—I declare I forget my manners! And I'll just steep the coffee. It's right glad you'll be of a drop after that stuffy train."

Elizabeth had stood in the corner during this while. She was a little wounded for everyone seemed oblivious of her existence. When Mrs. Fjelstad seated herself in the front room she thought best, however, to go in and make herself known. She hesitated on the threshold uncertain of just what to say when Balder came dashing from upstairs whence he had gone with their grips. He caught her arm chummily.

"Well, Elizabeth, it's good to see you, you know!" Then drawing her towards his mother, "This is Elizabeth Lindal, mother. You remember how much I've been telling you about the Lindals. Elizabeth is a great girl—finest friend a chap ever had! Just like a sister all these years; isn't that so, Beta?" he turned a merry face to Elizabeth.

She was conscious only of gathering anger with herself. Why should she blush and tremble and act like a silly school girl? In reality she was calm enough but such was her inward rebellion that she fancied every word and gesture betrayed it. She managed some jocular remark, however, and then went to his mother, taking a chair beside her. Mrs.

Fjelstad looked searchingly at the two young faces. She reached over and patted Elizabeth's hand.

"You have a good taste in sisters, my son," she told Balder laughingly.

"Well, rather," said he, going to the piano and lifting down his violin case. Elizabeth turned scarlet. "Aunt Finna," Balder called, "is there time for just one tune?" There was pleading in his voice and eagerness.

How his fingers longed to be at their beloved strings! Finna came to the door and meeting his beseeching eyes, nodded.

"Sure, dearie, if it's your mother will excuse the delay. The coffee will be all the better for a bit longer steeping."

Balder threw her a kiss, and lifting the violin from its bed, nestled it under his chin and sounded the tone. The tuning over, he drew the bow across the strings twice, softly, caressingly, and the air vibrated with a quivering sigh, like the sound of a soul set free. Then he launched into a passionate song of love and adoration. His mother listened with her heart in her eyes. She was pale with suppressed emotion.

"My son, my son!—and do you play like this!" Her cry recalled him from his dreamings as he finished. He laughed goodnaturedly at his mother's wonder.

"That wasn't so much, just a little favorite song of mine."

"What was it?"

"Oh, the name of it?—er—well—'Rhadames' Song to Aida," he answered.

But Elizabeth, who had heard the opera, knew that he lied—knew that it was his own song to Ninna.

The violin rested upon his knees and he drew his fingers back and forth over its satin surface. "Mother, do you like red hair?" he asked.

"Do I like red hair?" she repeated, "red hair." Something unpleasant moved in the dark corners of her mind. Balder saw a frightened look leap into her eyes and could

have kicked himself for his carelessness. "Oh, no, no!" she told him in short hurried utterance. "Oh, no! Red is such a primitive color. Such a cruel color, like a . . . like . . ." she searched for her reason, but somehow could not quite recall what had been the unpleasant thing that frightened her. "Such a cruel color, like a flame that seeks to devour one," she finished.

Balder was all contrition and was on his knees beside her in a moment.

"Poor little mother, poor little mother," he crooned, "what a sad time you've had of it! How much I must make up to you."

"Oh, you have, you have! If you only knew what it means to me to hear you play like this." She bent forward searching his face, then laying a hand on her breast, went on:

"There was a time when I wanted to sing. Oh, how I wanted to sing! I thought I should die from the pain in my heart. But you know how that ended. Then there were the months before you came. I used to wander off into the woods to get away from the work I so hated. . . . I guess I never was a brave woman. . . . And there in the woods I used to sing and sing! Sometimes I used to think that the birds joined me. Those were, perhaps, the happiest times of my life. I was so angry at Providence, so foolishly unhappy as the years crept on. And I never dreamed that into your baby hands God had placed my little broken melodies. Oh, Balder, Balder, how shall I make you understand what this means?"

He took her into his arms, soothing her as he had so often done in the years when they were alone together. He had not thought much of those times lately. How vividly they now arose before him! Those awful winters when as a little boy he did his feeble best to care for the house and his mother. How he had shivered in the frosty mornings! How his arms had ached carrying feed and water for the

cow whose milk was so important to them! It seemed like a hideous nightmare now. He almost doubted their reality. But it had all been only too true then.

These last few days which had taught him so much of the innate fineness of his mother's character, had also shown him how terrible must have been that torture which brought on the long eclipse of reason—that strange dream existence, where fancies haunted and realities were alien. And how she had sung! Would he ever forget those plaintive fragments of song! How they had, at times, broken in upon his sleep, waking him in the dark gloomy hours like some cry from a distant sphere, and again how they had recalled to him the manifold duties of the day, when like some bird of the dawn, she had burst into song at the first faint streaks of light. Her little broken melodies—were they then in his keeping?

"Mother, darling, I think I understand. Now let me play you something that I'm working very hard on. Something of my own. . . Our good friend Fru Haldora sees much promise in it. Let me play it, mother; then tell me what you think of it."

This time as he played, the peculiar wailing, irresolute prelude, his mind fastened upon those other evil days. And now with them so vividly before him there crept a strength and depth into the music which had not been there before. On and on he played, and it seemed to them that listened as if their very hearts would break within them. There was some sorrow there inexplicable. What was it? They must know! They must know! Something lovely was leaving them. It must not be! They could not bear it! Something was searching, searching, and ever wailed its defeat. Then that medley of sorrowful uncertainties died away. Wiped out like the darkness by the hand of dawn. Softly, yet sure and swift like the rising of the golden god, followed a burst of ever-swelling melody. An exultant and wonderful thing! The reincarnation of all those lost and

wailing things. Those broken melodies all in their place, all part of a clear and glorious whole. That search for something fair was over. That cry for something lost at an end. With a final burst of victorious gladness Balder drew his bow away. The air still vibrated with the music.

Finna stood in the doorway, her face incredulous with wonder. Tomi sat on the stairs and marvelled at the pain he had felt and the still stranger joy. Elizabeth was like a colorless statue, her eyes still fixed on the face she so loved, in her heart a new resolution. But on Anna Fjeldstad's countenance was a light of pure and holy rapture. The tears were still gleaming in her great dark eyes, but her head was proudly up and her bosom heaving fast. She held out her arms.

"My son, my son!" was all she said, but in her voice all love and praise was gathered.

Balder was a little pale himself and his cold fingers trembled as he took his mother's hands, but he only laughed and kissed her dewy eyes.

"You know them, then, mother?"

"Always, always! What do you call them?"

He raised her to her feet. "Come dear, no more of them. Finna is waiting with the coffee."

She reproached him with her glance. He shrugged. "It's very silly perhaps, but I like to think of a little bird that flies around the world with his song bringing tears from hard hearts and inspiring kindness in cruel hands. I'll not tell you the name till it's better worthy of one. Auntie," he called, "how rude we are to keep you so. You must hold me responsible."

Finna had no knowledge of music. An Irish melody or a Beethoven Sonata were all the same to her. But she had a heart unspoiled and responsive. And perhaps after all the real testing ground for any art is the human heart. She came now with her coffee pot in one hand and a little china

stand in the other to the table where her friends were seated unceremoniously.

"Dear lad, it's as if I had stood in the presence of angels—in the presence of angels that welcomed a simple woman like me. Picture it! Mrs. Fjelstad, him that grew up like a weed in the wood. How good is our God!" Then brushing back a strand of sandy hair, she began pouring the coffee. "I declare," she added, passing the cups around, "it's fairly afraid I get sometimes with these clever young folk about me! It's just like having so much silverware that thieves may break in to steal."

CHAPTER XXIII

ELIZABETH MAKES A DECISION

Ah love! Could you and I with him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

—Omar Khayyam

There is a streak of faithfulness to a single idea in some men and women, which, turned into useful channels, creates success, or, left unguided, degenerates into mere stubbornness. There was such a streak in Elizabeth.

After she came to the realization that she had been clinging blindly to a dream existence, she began painfully to analyze herself. In the slow watches of the night, she spent many a weary hour when, like Jacob, she wrestled with her angel. She shuddered with exaggerated horror at the sinfulness she felt her past behavior to have been. Why, she had been content to waste the years simply waiting for Balder's love! The innocent unconscious growth of her childish affections now appeared to her as a gross and dreadful thing. She felt herself to have been a shameless creature, not differing greatly from the women who deliberately angled for the men of their choice. But worse than this, she had been a spineless being waiting with folded hands for her desire to come to her. Why, Ninna, whom she accused of vanity and silliness, had been more energetic. What she had wanted she had gone out and taken.

Elizabeth's was a slow, thorough mind rather than a bril-

liant one and its chief characteristic innate honesty and fidelity. That had been the thread which had so closely tied her to this youth whom even as a child she had taken under her wing. But now the tide being turned back, her mind travelled with equal tenacity and force in the opposite direction. She perceived at last that hers was the duty to cleave out a separate and distinct path and upon this one idea the whole strength of her mind fastened.

Miss Olson had long since let her design many a dress, for Elizabeth had a natural gift for the blending of colors and took genuine delight in building a lovely gown. So now instead of reading *David Copperfield* or *Silas Marner* of nights, she read feverishly about textiles, color combinations, and fashions and modes old and new.

She cluttered up Mrs. Johnson's neat dining room with endless drawings of dresses. Dresses for the fat; dresses for the lean; dresses for the young and dresses for the old. Poor Finna was inclined to demur at first. But one evening Elizabeth gave the Johnson family such an entertaining lecture on the development of fashion, illustrating the various stages, that the good Finna saw at once what a game it was and strangely enough gave Elizabeth a very valuable idea. She had just been explaining the colors that were to be combined in a little evening wrap, when Finna clapped her hands delightedly.

"Now, dearie, wouldn't it be pretty if you just got some of those colors that children use in school and made your picture look just like you say?"

"Why, I suppose so. But I don't know anything about colors. I'd be sure to run them all together."

"Sure, and is that much of a job to learn for such a smart girl? Why, it's Fru Haldora herself could show you—she that painted so many pictures of the blessed sea in the Old Land."

"Auntie, you are the wisest woman!" Elizabeth was all on fire with this new idea. Of course, it would help, would

save a lot of explanation! She meant some day to send these drafts to an Eastern designer and also to the largest dressmaking establishment in Winnipeg. She had quite a nest egg now in the bank, for Miss Olson paid her well and she had risen to the important role of fitter. Besides this she got a percentage on every dress she designed. When she had saved enough she meant to go to a designing school and learn the business thoroughly.

Fru Haldora and Sjera Bjarni were deeply interested in her ambition, being gratified to see that at last she was about to make use of the talents she possessed.

"But, I am not so sure that I can teach you much," the dignified Fru Haldora told her. "I am an old woman now, my dear, and I only painted a little for pastime in my youth, like many another girl. It never amounted to more than an innocent desire for making something pretty—just as one does fancy work or crocheting. Still, I may remember something about pigments and, as I understand it, its just the blending of colors you want to know."

The very next week Elizabeth went for her first lesson and they all had a very merry time over it. The old minister insisted upon being allowed to color one of her drawings, choosing a very frilly and fussy frock.

"Now, now, don't you laugh at me," he told his wife and her pupil, "all my life I have regretted being unable to wear a pink habit, and now I'm going to paint me a very pink dress. Do you suppose a little pearl and blue could be worked in somewhere?"—he was very serious studying the sketch head on side, one fine old hand stroking his beard—"like the shades of morning, you know?"

"Would you ever have suspected it," his wife ridiculed him, "so much vanity under a black vesture. My dear, how would you like me to attend service in that frilly thing?"

"Well, now, I'm not so sure but that it would be very refreshing for a minister to look down upon a congregation

like an apple orchard in spring. . . . No, not so sure at all. . . ."

"Oh, you are incorrigible, Bjarni, and your age seems not to improve you at all. Go on, make your pink dress and put it on spiritually. Then while I make us a cup of coffee, Elizabeth can tell us the latest news of Balder."

"Make the coffee very weak, please, my dear. My spirit may regain its youth under the pink gown, but I'm in doubts about the stomach."

Elizabeth looked at the dear old face of the minister as he bent over the drawing, working carefully with a brush. How beautiful he grew from day to day. Of late she could not rid herself of an idea that this man stood very close to the portals of the wider life. It seemed as if already the clear light from Beyond were upon him—shining through him. For the frail flesh was but a thin mask for the strong soul within. He was always jovial, always eager for news of his people. But it was no secret that his health was on a steady decline. It was not from any spoken sermon, any hint of future things that she derived her dread—yet there was more of reverence in her mind than dread. And she saw how beautiful is age such as his. How clearly the mark of God's hand was upon him. Just to be near him was more convincing proof of the benefits of righteous living than any speech he might utter.

"Yes, daughter, what new developments have we in the field?" he asked.

"Not very many. Miss Thompson comes to the city on Friday and Balder has engaged a nice little flat of three rooms in Mrs. Hafstein's house."

"You mean Mrs. Olafson's," Sjera Bjarni corrected her. "I just married the good woman last month to Mr. Olafson, don't forget."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. But we still call her Mrs. Hafstein. I dare say her new husband wouldn't like it. But, anyway, they have a large house on Ross Street and they don't need it

all with only the three of them in the family, so Mrs. Hafstein—I mean Mrs. Olafson—was very glad to give Balder the rooms. It'll be pleasant there for Mrs. Fjelstad, for Mrs. Olafson is such a nice woman and Margaret a very lovely girl."

"Yes, indeed—very clever too, she is—in the last year of high school now and likely Mr. Olafson will put her through normal when the time comes." He pushed the drawings away and sighed. "Well, well, how healing are the years! How good it is to my old eyes, seeing fortune changing for my people. If I dared to think that I had done my best, I should say with gratitude—Let now Thy servant pass."

He leaned back in his chair and the light from the chandelier fell upon his grey hair lending it a silver gleam. His fine old face was suddenly very weary and Elizabeth saw what a network of lines seamed it. As an inspiration it flashed upon her that therein lay the beauty of his countenance. Those lines were the seal to the life he had lived—not shunning toil nor fleeing sorrow, but rather from a high mountain having viewed dispassionately the world, he had chosen Gethsemane instead.

That was the art of life! Now the canvas was almost finished, the illuminating touches of God's light were being filled in. Then would come the filing away in the Great Gallery.

"But I must not let the past claim me," he said; "that were a concession to age. Go on, child, when does Balder go to Boston? I think he has heard from the conductor of the Symphony?"

"Yes, Sjera Bjarni, he has. And he is to have a hearing sometime next month. He intends leaving in two or three weeks, but of course he will tell you all about it himself when he is through settling things for his mother. He is renting the farm out on shares and retaining some of the stock. He sold just enough to help him out for a while with expenses

because he didn't want to draw out any of his mother's money."

"I know all that, child. I advised him not to sell. The railroad is creeping slowly down that way now and some day he will find the land a good investment. I have a presentiment that our young Balder will be a very rich man some day—but better than that, he will help to re-light the extinguished candle of Iceland's ancient glory. Well, well, another bead to my chain, another precious pearl to my girdle!"

His wife brought in her dainty cups and passed them around. "What were you saying about my clever Balder—that he would be rich? Foolish ones, say rather he will be great. And that from his fingers will flow the songs of the soul of his people. Here you are, my dear, just a faint blend of coffee and some of my own rusks. You must remind Balder, Elizabeth, that he is to play for me that composition of his before he leaves and that I want more power in it. Much more power! Tell him to think less of pretty flowers and singing birds and more of struggling humanity. Poor blind humanity with its groping clumsy hands—then perhaps of an Elijah and a great dawn. Sjera Bjarni here, chatters about a pearl for his girdle. Well, I shall not rest content till I have this diamond polished for my crown. Balder has genius but life has not yet tempered him. Poor lad, he would not thank me for saying that I feel he must experience some humiliation, some deep grief, before he can create a soul for his lovely composition. Now then, we must color this evening wrap and that pretty debutante's frock."

CHAPTER XXIV

A NEW DEVELOPMENT

The worldly hopes men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes—or it prospers; and anon
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.

—Omar Khayyam.

As the summer drew near its close, the Lindals watched with growing satisfaction the ripening of their grain. From the back porch there might be viewed a long sweep of wheat-field. This particular plot of ground Borga had named "Thor's College Acres." With the rays of the sun smiling down upon it, the field became a gently undulating sea of yellow gold. She often stepped to the door of an early morning to see this yellow field—this golden store which meant so much to all of them, but most to her.

"Just a few more days of this hot weather and we'll be at the cutting," Bjorn told her one morning. It was hot; though it was still early the day was already insufferably hot and close. As the hours dragged on toward noon, Mrs. Lindal became steadily more depressed. It was so hard to hurry in such breathless weather! Never before had the preparation of their midday meal been quite so difficult.

The big kitchen with windows and doors wide open was nevertheless a fiery furnace. But more than this she could not rid herself of a feeling of impending evil. Not a breath of air stirred. All nature seemed burning and panting with heat.

Then, suddenly, preceded by an ominous roll, a crash of

thunder ripped the heavy air. Borga felt her heart sink. She knew now what the strange dread portended. It was going to storm—it was going to hail.

Swift and terrible the storm broke. A few minutes of falling raindrops—huge drops that struck the ground in noisy graceless splashes. Then the hail!

Bjorn had been out in the barn repairing harness when the rain began and had made a run for the house because his wife had always been timid in a thunderstorm.

They stood now side by side, and with the first crash of hail her hand reached almost unconsciously for his. So they stood through the long five minutes while the proud, beautiful wheat was ripped and torn and beaten to the ground before them.

As suddenly as it had come the storm passed. In its wake a fresh cool wind followed. The sun came from behind a cloud and beamed upon the earth as benignant as before. But all through the southwest country the storm had left a ten-mile wide path of destruction.

Bjorn said nothing. His shoulders sagged a little when he went out to see his other fields, that was all. Borga said nothing either. But her coffee boiled over and the potatoes scorched as she sat quite still and impassive before the stove.

Thor had gone to town for his father with a broken part of the binder, and since he was to wait for it and also do various errands for his mother, he did not return until near supper-time. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the wheatfield. For a moment he was stunned,—this would doubtless mean no college that fall. Then he thought of his mother and bounded into the house.

She was in the kitchen where so much of her life was spent both summer and winter, peeling turnips beside the table. Her usually brisk fingers fumbled awkwardly at the task and Thor saw that this usually merry mother of his looked old and tired.

"Hello, mamma," he called, "Gee it's good to be home!" She tried to smile but the attempt was a failure. The light had gone from her eyes. Instead she crumpled up as if all strength of soul were leaving her, and dropping her head down amid the pots and pans, sobbed as Thor had never heard her sob in all his life.

He wound his strong young arms about her. He took her apron and wiped her eyes awkwardly. Then he kissed her, talking steadily a stream of nonsense. "Why, mamma! It's because of me; now isn't it? All these tears just because you can't get rid of me in a few days! Why, mother, I'm ashamed of you. I thought you loved me. Darn it all, what's a fellow to pin his faith to anyhow?" He pretended to be mortally offended. "This is all the reward I get for a life time of faithful service! Ah, mother, how could you!"

She could hardly resist a smile. Her over-wrought nerves were relieved by the fit of weeping and Thor, who should have been the one most disappointed, was meeting this catastrophe so cheerfully.

"But you worked so hard to finish your two grades this summer—and now it's all for nothing. Your father thinks we'll have to sell some of the stock to meet our obligations. Only the oats are left and that will never clear our expenses let alone leave any profit. And there's still a payment to make on the furniture."

"Now don't worry, mamma. No, you sit still. Give me your apron—there, that's the girl. Now you just watch little Thor proceed to cook! As for me, shucks! Tell you the truth, I'm glad to get a rest. Sure, darn glad, mamma! 'Twas a pretty stiff year, you know," he told her, making a plunge after a mischievous turnip that eluded his grasp.

So they argued back and forth as more or less triumphantly he went about his cooking preparations. He was cutting cold meat in jagged clumsy slices, when the front door banged and Ninna came skipping out into the kitchen.

"Hello folks!" she called merrily, then strutted back and forth like a peacock before them.

Borga, being used to her daughter's ways, scarcely noticed her at first. Then, with hot anger rising, saw that she was displaying a beautiful fur-lined coat.

"What's all this about?" she demanded, "what are you doing in a winter coat this time of year?"

Ninna sent her a kiss. "That's how clever I am, mamma! I was just visiting Miss Cairns at Calhoun's to-day. They were ordering the winter stock from a salesman. He had this sample coat and Mr. Calhoun let me buy it for seventy-five dollars. Isn't it beautiful, mamma, and so cheap?"

"Ninna, did you see your father's wheatfield? No?—well, go out on the porch and look at it."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! Poor papa, after working so hard. But isn't the coat lovely? You haven't said anything about it, mamma."

Borga arose wrathfully. She stepped up to her spoiled daughter and removed with firm hands the luxurious coat and flung it on a chair.

"Now, then, my daughter, once and for all let us come to an understanding. Is there never a thought in your head for anyone except yourself! Does even the destruction of our crop mean nothing to you? Have you no idea just what this means to your father and me and Thor?"

Ninna opened her mouth to excuse herself, but her mother silenced her with a gesture.

"You talk too much. Chatter is the sign of an empty head and a foolish heart. You seem not to remember that Thor was to have gone to Winnipeg this fall. You seem likewise to have forgotten that your father hasn't yet finished paying for the furniture you wanted so badly. Why, heaven knows, for you are never home except to sleep."

Ninna was growing angry. "What has all this to do with my buying a coat out of my own money?" she snapped.

"You don't need it," her mother said. "What's the mat-

ter with the coat your father bought last fall? Why, Ninna, Ninna, think what even seventy-five dollars would mean to Thor just now."

Borga sank down on a chair. She was truly amazed at this child so soft and lovable to look upon yet so cold and hard in reality.

"Heavens, mamma," Thor whirled upon her, "do you suppose I'd take any of her money? Lord, no! Think what a dash she can cut in that coat. Besides, I can go to work. Mr. Peabody was saying to-day he wished he could get a strong young fellow to help him."

"Mr. Peabody," his mother reiterated dully, "Mr. Peabody?"

"Yes, the butcher on Thirty-first and Second, don't you remember?"

"Can't you get a position in an office?" Ninna flung the words at him.

"Sure, I could—for five dollars a week. But it's money I need, not a white collar. Don't worry, you won't have to speak to me on the street!"

"Oh, Thor!" There was genuine feeling in the wail. Then Ninna dashed upstairs.

Once in her room she flung herself upon the bed. A mingling of rage and contrition possessed her. She was too clever not to recognize in part her own selfishness. She knew that she played upon everyone's feelings to get what she desired. But to get what one wanted appeared to her an essential and logical thing. In the bottom of her heart she loved, after her own fashion, her people. And like the rest of the family was really very proud of Thor. It had been gratifying to hear him as valedictorian of his class and to know what honors he was taking.

And just now because of a miserable hailstorm he was going to drive a butcher's rig and mess about with horrid cuts of raw meat! And her mother raised the roof because she had been wise enough to buy herself a winter coat.

Ninna was miserable. Deep down under the veneer of selfishness the still small voice was speaking. Seventy-five dollars was a lot of money to spend on herself just then. She slipped into the softly padded coat, her luxury-loving body revelling in its silkiness. She stroked lovingly the fur collar that rose so prettily about her golden head. She even shed a few tears as one weeps for lost treasure. "Oh, well," she sighed, "I guess Mr. Calhoun will take it back."

Next morning she said nothing to her mother. Nevertheless she did not intend letting her martyrdom pass unnoticed. When she entered Doctor Whitman's office she thumped herself down in a listless attitude.

He had reached that hopeless stage of infatuation which waits feverishly upon each varying mood of the beloved. He immediately longed to go out and do battle. Whatever in the world had brought such sadness to her dear little face!

"Miss Lindal, Ninna! What is it?" He leaned over her chair beseechingly.

She waved him aside wearily—Ninna was a born actress, but unfortunately the "silver sheet" had not then sent out its call for volunteers.

"Nothing much. Just the hail, you know—father's wheat all ruined. And Thor was to have gone to college this fall."

There! He had known it all the time. In spite of her pretty vagaries, she was at heart an angel.

"Oh, Miss Lindal, let me help you. You know how I would love it. That there is nothing I wouldn't do for you."

Ninna decided that this was quite far enough. She got up quickly.

"Listen then, Doctor Whitman. Call Mr. Calhoun for me—tell him that I'm coming over. That I want to return the coat I bought yesterday—I need the money for Thor."

He was every bit as impressed as she intended him to be. He was an old friend of the Calhoun family and over the telephone made Mr. Calhoun understand just what a sacrifice this lovely girl was making.

"Well, well, the pretty little thing," old Mr. Calhoun kept muttering after he had received the message, "the pretty little thing!"

When Ninna brought him the coat, with a sad and crest-fallen air, for she was genuine enough in her disinclination to relinquish it, he told her gruffly that she could keep it and pay him in five dollar payments. To her credit be it said that this possibility had not presented itself to her. Old Mr. Calhoun told his wife that evening, that it had been like a sunrise to see her face brighten.

"Mr. Calhoun! Oh, Mr. Calhoun, you darling!" Impetuously she flung her white arms about his neck and kissed the bald spot on his head. But Mr. Calhoun never told old Mrs. Calhoun that.

That night Ninna gave her mother the seventy-five dollars.

"Don't tell Thor," she whispered, "or he'll never take it." There was a generosity in this caution of which she was well aware.

Borga caught her to her breast. To find herself mistaken in the character of her child brought her more joy than the much needed money. But Ninna disentangled herself quickly. She disliked emotion and detested tears except as weapons of warfare. Then, too, she was rather proud of herself and her sun-loving soul quickly forgot the shadows.

"Never mind what you said." She kissed her mother lightly. "I've forgotten it. And see, I've got the coat too, Calhoun wouldn't take it back."

"Oh, I'm so glad, my child!" Her mother was all eagerness. That was so good of him. Very good, indeed!"

"And mamma, I'm going to pay you ten dollars a month for board. Doctor Whitman raised my wages to-day."

"Ninna, my darling!"

But Ninna fled. And it never occurred to Borga until late in the night that only Ninna seemed endowed with some magic power enabling her both to eat her cake and keep it.

CHAPTER XXV

REVEALING MANY THINGS

Pleasures are ever in our hands and eyes;
And when in act they cease, in prospect rise:
All spread their charms, but charm not all alike;
On different senses, different objects strike.

—Pope.

Balder had gone to the East. To Elizabeth the days were drab and dreary. There had been an incentive to work while he was near for she wished to hide with feverish activity the wounds of her soul. But now her efforts flagged. Mrs. Johnson ascribed her listlessness to the weather when she mentioned it one evening to Tomi. Her son astonished her by kicking the cat which had innocently crossed his path.

"Why, Tomi! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Come, pussy, pussy! Did the bad boy hurt you!"

"Ma," the poor young man burst out, "are you blind? Don't you see it's Balder?"

"What is Balder, foolish one?"

"That Elizabeth misses. Haven't you seen that she worships him?"

His mother experienced a shock. Why to be sure now that she gave it thought, Elizabeth always had been exceedingly devoted. What books the poor child had waded through in order to learn something of his favorite composers! But then he had always been like one of the Lindals. That edge to her own boy's voice; *that* worried her. She shot a swift and penetrative glance in his direction.

"It's nothing but queerness—is a woman's actions. Tears sometimes are a joy and laughter only sadness. Don't you be sitting round making stories in your head like a grandmother. And it's not my cat you need be kicking. . . . The idea, well now we have a light! What a foolishness! Where did you see any love in Balder, I ask you, except for his music?"

"That's just it!" Her son became dramatic in his efforts to clear himself of idle fancies. "He told me himself that he was engaged to Ninna."

Finna folded her hands across her gaunt bosom. "Tomi Johnson—what's got into you! What are you telling me? What kind of wife would that little minx make, I ask you? Answer me that,—for my Balder, so thin and so cross sometimes with his tunes all twisted, and needing a sensible quiet woman and a good cook."

"Well, it's not my fault, mamma," her son answered dejectedly, "poor Elizabeth."

"Now we have a light! I repeat it! Picture it! What a craziness! Is he blind, I wonder, that boy? And him living all these years with her so good and sweet. Dear, dear! It's like I always say, men are like moles, poor things, just like moles. . . . But I ask you, Tomi Johnson, is it mooning round like a calf you should be? Why don't you cheer the poor child up? Haven't you no sense at all? Or is there no heart in you?"

Tomi was used to his mother's harmless tirades. Her words fell upon him like May showers. He rather enjoyed to be splashed in them. They refreshed him.

"You know that I try, but she'll never go anywhere," he told her, and Finna did not fancy the timbre of his voice.

It was on the following day that Elizabeth received a letter from her mother telling what had befallen them. That unless there was some way of raising more money Thor would have to lose a year's schooling.

Elizabeth had been steeped in a lethargy, the reaction

from a too violent change of mental effort, when the letter came. As she read, all thought of self vanished. She saw only her dear, hardworking mother face to face with a new fear—the terrible fear that perhaps her son might never realize all she desired for him. Elizabeth, who had within her the true maternal heart, understood what this meant. And Thor, her dear brother, with his lovable boyish ways; his mischievous bursts of merriment; and his clean sweet flights of fancy—what a disappointment for him!

She was so carried away by sympathy that when the knowledge that she could help them dawned upon her, it came as if by heavenly inspiration. She leaped up from the supper table where she had been sitting, knocked her chair over, frightening Finna half to death and rushed upstairs.

She came down again, flushed and triumphant, waving in her hand a little red bank book.

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie! Isn't it wonderful! Look!"

She shoved the book before Finna's astonished eyes. That good woman saw nothing on the small red-lined page, for she gazed in open-mouthed astonishment at Elizabeth.

"Why, whatever is it! Is it a sickness you're getting, maybe?"

"No, no!" Elizabeth sank back into her chair. "It's money! Three hundred good dollars, Auntie! Think of it! And still they say money is the root of all evil!"

Finna glanced at her Einar as though to say, What do you make of it? But Einar only munched his food slowly and carefully as usual.

"What's it all about, Elizabeth?" Tomi asked her.

"You poor darlings! It's really this; father has been hailed out and there's no money to send Thor to college—but here," she waved aloft the little book, "is the solution. Three hundred good dollars—more than he will need. Next summer he can teach and so, you see, mamma needn't worry any more about him. Of course he could have worked this past summer too, but he was needed on the farm. If you

knew how hard he studied! It means so much to him to get to Winnipeg this year."

"Elizabeth," Finna laid down her knife and fork and turned a solemn face toward her, "isn't that the money you want to go to that designing school?"

"Why, what of that! Thor mustn't wait. He's going to be a wonderful man some day—a great surgeon. What does it matter about making dresses for silly women? You see that, don't you, Auntie? Think how wonderful to go about mending the broken and crippled." She reddened a little. Like her mother she was not a garrulous woman. "It's like having the spirit of God with one—He loved to heal the sick. Oh, Auntie, even helping Thor a little will some day mean a sick child well, a cripple straight again. Isn't that something to rejoice in?" She was a little ashamed and confused.

Finna leaned across the table and patted her hand. "It's a good lamb you are and that's a fact! Picture it, Einar, what a goodness! And her that wants so much to learn to make these topless dresses that the fine ladies wear. I declare it's my heart would break if this wasn't for my dear Thor, God bless him! What a baby he was—five teeth at eight months, don't you remember Einar? And such a heft to him! But my dear mother used to say 'Our God knows His own business; don't meddle in His plans.' There'll be a way for you too, dearie, and that's the truth!"

Elizabeth lost no time. That very evening she wrote home telling her mother she was prepared to pay Thor's fees, his board, and to buy whatever books he needed. "I insist upon it," she wrote, "Thor can repay me when he begins to teach. Aunt Finna wants him to come here. There's plenty of room now that Balder is gone."

When the letter was posted, she began to puzzle out a new campaign for herself. She perceived that it would be wise to be prepared for such another emergency. Thor would not be earning much for years to come and a Uni-

versity education was expensive. It were well to be ready to help if their father again met with disaster.

A chance remark of one of Miss Olson's customers gave her an idea, which, wild though it seemed, she decided to act upon. This lady was having a gown made for the annual horse show which always was a great event of the year and Elizabeth had designed it.

"Mr. Krantz would give much for this model," the pleased customer told Elizabeth, as she preened before the revolving mirror in Miss Olson's very cozy fitting room.

Mr. Krantz was manager and part owner of a very large and up-to-date ladies' wear establishment, a house where one might buy astonishing copies of Paris models and where one might also have made to order yet other copies of these same frocks, in the mysterious inner rooms of Mr. Krantz's stylish store.

During the next few days Elizabeth worked late into the night sketching and coloring and on a Saturday morning, having told Miss Olson her plan, she dressed herself with care, took her roll of drawings and set out for Mr. Krantz's establishment.

He was a short, hook-nosed individual, shrewd and sharp of eye. He ran a speculative glance over Elizabeth's good, well-fitting suit, grunted, and pointed to a chair.

"Well, Miss, what can I do for you?"

She opened her roll of sketches, drew her chair nearer his desk and laid a dazzling array of evening dresses and wraps before him.

Mr. Krantz was surprised. He grunted again, picked up two of the sketches and held them out at arm's length.

"Where did you learn it?" he demanded.

"Didn't—I just do it. I'm a fitter at Miss Olson's on William Avenue," she answered.

"What you want then?" he growled, still studying the two drawings.

"To design for you," she told him in a firm clear voice.

"H-m,—but my modiste has been with me for many years. She'd kick up a row."

Elizabeth nodded. "Yes, I know," she smiled a little, "I've heard of her. But I have a plan. You must send me away—to New York or Chicago—perhaps to Lucille. Then when I return you can advertise that Krantz has now its own designer, straight from New York. Your dressmaker could not object to that. Besides, I would only do the season's designing; she would still direct the actual making of the gowns."

Mr. Krantz had fixed his beady eyes upon Elizabeth during her recital. He grunted. Grunting was to Mr. Krantz what purring is to a cat. He was proud of being a selfmade man; he liked initiative. In other words he was pleased with this tall, level-eyed young lady who told him so calmly that he should send her to a designing school.

"But how should I know that you'd ever return," he barked at her. "What would I get for my money?"

She smiled at him. "I think I can give you good references. I had thought that I should be able to pay my own way, but something has changed that—when I come back I will work for you until you are repaid."

Mr. Krantz drummed on his desk. "I'll tell you what—" he popped out of his seat like a jack-in-a-box, "if Miss Olson gives good reports of you, I'll risk it. But mind, you'll have to give Krantz the season's first designs for the next three years to come," and he swooped down upon the sketches, "these I'll use if I see fit. Now, then, when can you go? Six months ought to do. There's not much to teach you that I can see. You're a born designer."

"As soon as we hear from the schools—I could go at almost a moment's notice," she told him.

"Fine. That's good." Old Krantz shook her hand jerkily. A woman with a head on her and a nerve. That's good!—very good! Fine! "Good day, Miss—Miss—" he spread his hands and shrugged—

"Elizabeth Lindal."

"Fine, good—sensible name. Good day, Miss Lindal."

Mrs. Johnson was aghast when Elizabeth related the details of the interview. To her simple soul it seemed a terrible and dangerous thing for Elizabeth to go so far and to such a wild and wicked city.

"Why, dearie, it's that wild, I hear it's not safe to sleep in one's bed. Oh, dear, picture it! what a queerness, the way girls go on nowadays. Why it's married you should be with a good man to care for, and not running off to strange cities."

Elizabeth laughed. She was surprised at herself and mostly so because life suddenly seemed less grey. It was good to have some motive for striving. There was also in her some of that wanderlust which never quits the Scandinavian heart. In the timid it may only vent itself in the constant fluttering from house to house, or again, in the bolder, in wandering from city to city and sea to sea.

"But Auntie, I can't very well kidnap a man, can I?"

Finna sniffed. "There's easier ways than that," said she quite shamelessly.

It was lodge night and Mrs. Johnson, being a grand officer of some kind and very proud of the fact, had to go. Elizabeth stayed at home to do her washing. She was rubbing away, singing to herself happily, when Tomi came in. He perched himself on the kitchen table and looked at her silently.

"I thought you had gone with your mother," She made the statement idly, scanning the while a little white waist for any hidden spot.

"No. I want to talk to you." There was something strained in his voice. Elizabeth felt a queer uneasiness taking possession of her.

"Well, talk then," she laughed.

"Beta—I have nearly a thousand dollars in the bank—

not much, because I've been helping with this house—but it's yours if you need it."

"Why Tom, you silly dear. Are you worrying about me too?"

Tomi managed a wry smile, but Elizabeth had a mad impulse to flee from the look in his eyes.

"I guess I'll always worry about you, Elizabeth. I'm just a great rough fellow—always was—always will be. And there's none like you. I . . . Oh shucks! You know what I mean." He came toward her, his face dead white. "Oh—no. Beta, don't look at me like that. All I wanted to say was whatever I have is yours if you ever need it. Please remember."

He stood looking at her a little while where she leaned against the wall, the washtub between them. Then jerking his cap down fiercely over his eyes, he turned on his heel and went out.

"Oh, Tomi! Oh, Tomi!" Elizabeth came out of her surprise like a sleeper from an evil dream. She ran to the door hardly knowing what she wanted or intended to do, conscious only that someone needed sympathy. But Tomi was already half way down the lane.

During the days that followed he found a way to elude her. Then came the excitement of meeting Thor and showing him the wonders of Winnipeg. This had scarcely ended before Mr. Krantz sent for Elizabeth and in a week from that day she left for Chicago.

The Johnsons and Thor saw her off with varying emotions. Einar and Finna could not restrain a half mournful look, they still felt this a very risky undertaking. Thor and Tomi waved her a gay farewell. But just as the train began to crawl slowly away, Tomi ran ahead to her window.

"Remember, Elizabeth, what I told you," he said.

And Elizabeth, bravely blinking her eyes, threw him a kiss.

"Foolish one, I shall never forget."

CHAPTER XXVI

A PIPE AND A BUFFALO HORN

As a wind off many waters,
Comes a voice from the hereafter;
From the islands of the blessed
From the Land of Happy Hunters.

—L. G. S.

It was on a night late in February that Mrs. Johnson heaved a great sigh as she carried the dishes from the table. It was not a mild, self-indulged sort of sigh, but a very pronounced one. It ruffled the lazy contentment of the family. Three pairs of masculine eyes turned upon her.

"What's the matter?" they demanded as with one voice.

Finna sighed again, removed the table cloth and in its place laid the centerpiece.

"Oh, it's just a bit of lonesomeness. It's my Elizabeth I miss, and that's a fact. What with Tomi there laid up with his gripe and Thor so deep in books and my Einar with such a lumbago, it's not a companion I can get for a single visit. And me that promised Mrs. Olson and my dear Mrs. Fjelstad to go and see them these months past."

"Well now, mamma, if it wasn't so cold. . . ." Einar began, but she cut him off.

"Tish, papa, what a foolishness! It's enough liniment I have to rub on you already. Not a step do you go in this cold weather, poor man."

"Auntie, I'll tell you what we'll do," Thor interrupted her. "You do your dishes and get ready while I go over these notes, and then I'll go with you. It's Friday night anyway."

"Well now, isn't that the good lad for you! But it's just

what I was thinking—it's Friday night and maybe my Thor will go with his old Finna, and a nice thing it will be for him, a little visit. Picture it, papa, me walking out with a fine young man that I once held in my arms to be christened. It's a voice you had in you Thor, and that's a fact."

Mrs. Olafson's house was large and rather gloomy looking. It had about it a resigned but weary air, as if the vagaries of its many tenants had quite worn away its buoyancy. It was broad and square and grey like a squat old man that glares at one from under heavy eyebrows. There are houses like that. But inside there was a comfortable atmosphere.

Mr. Olafson was not at home but his wife and Margaret welcomed the visitors and Mrs. Olafson called up the stairs inviting Anna Fjelstad and Miss Thompson down. The women had a very merry time of it, exchanging apologies, news and gossip, and the big dining room was filled with the hum of their voices.

Margaret and Thor were a little left out of it, and so when the first restraint wore away they drew together and began a conversation all their own. She told him of her school and how her mother wanted her to be a teacher, but that she didn't really care for that herself.

"I'm going to be a doctor," he said.

"Oh, I think I should like that. But I'm not very strong. I might not stand the work. And anyway, mother thinks it's funny for a girl to be a doctor."

"Oh, I don't know," Thor was sympathetic. "Girls do a lot of strange things nowadays."

They had drifted into the front room where a motley of things were strewn about. Books and papers on a big table under the window; a scattering of odd chairs and cushions; a little stand with a beautiful fern; and a phonograph with a huge horn like a morning glory, which had been Mr. Olafsan's chief companion in his bachelor days. And in one corner was a what-not, holding pictures and odds and ends of bric-a-brac.

They became very friendly while they played the old phonograph. They shrieked at the scratched records and grew superlative in praise of the sentimental songs. When this delightful stage was reached, Thor began to satisfy his youthful curiosity by looking over the books and pictures about the room.

"Oh, I say, Margaret, who's this lady all trimmed up like a Christmas tree?" he asked, picking up a photograph from the what-not.

Margaret giggled. "That's a very rich woman mother worked for once—when I was a little girl. Weren't the styles funny! But she was very kind. I remember she came to see us once when mother was sick—I remember it because she brought her a basket of plums. I had never seen any plums before."

This caused them much merriment. It struck them as very funny. Indeed, everything they said seemed charged with merriment.

"Well, what in the world. . . ." Thor began, stooping down and lifting up an old and very evil looking pipe, which had lain beside a finely polished drinking cup of buffalo horn.

"Oh, *don't!*" Margaret ran to him hastily, taking the pipe and putting it back in its place. She glanced fearfully over her shoulder into the other room, but seeing her mother's back toward them, smiled her relief.

"I'm sorry. But mother won't let anyone touch that pipe nor the drinking horn. You see it belonged to an old Indian who was very good to her. I don't know much about it, but somehow he's bound up with a memory of my little sister who died. But I remember Old Joe, he used to come and sit in our house or out in the yard for hours, saying very little but watching all we did. And then mother would bring him food. She always seemed glad to see him. I won't ever forget the last time he came. He was very ill and mother made him a bed in the kitchen and gave him something hot to

drink, but in the evening he got up again. I remember how he staggered as he went to the door and how mother entreated him to stay. But he straightened up somehow—I recall how big he appeared to me standing there as he looked at her.

“‘Goodbye, pale friend. I go to the White Lily,’” he said.

“I didn’t understand what he meant then, but I shall never forget the way he said it. Then he went out and down towards the river. Mother cried when he was gone and when she was taking up his bed, found that old pipe. I don’t think any money could buy it—she’s funny that way. He never came back,” she finished.

Thor had nothing to offer. He understood that something tragic lay behind the simple story, and Margaret assumed a new interest in his eyes for having shared it. “What a sensible little girl she is,” he thought, “not much like the general run of silly gigglers.” Then with the healthy fickleness of youth, they swerved to other topics. They found that they both were fond of skating and Margaret promised to go down to the river with him on Sunday afternoon.

On the way home again, he confided to Finna that Margaret was a very nice girl.

“And that she is, though her mother does say she isn’t very strong, poor thing, what with her being a bookworm and having had such a hard life as a little child. My, my, but there is a nip in the air! It’s my nose that’s like to freezing, and that’s the truth!”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WEB OF VANITY

When pride cometh, then cometh shame;
But with the lowly is wisdom.

—Proverbs 11:2

Elizabeth had returned from Chicago a very changed young woman and with the most flattering credentials. All the restraint, the backwardness, which had hindered her progress and popularity, had disappeared.

The great Lucille himself had been responsible in part for this.

"But yes. . . . You can draft—but look," he had whirled her about till she faced a mirror. "Impossible! . . . You can't dress. Your body means nothing to you. . . . So, you may have personality but no charm."

Elizabeth had not liked it. With all the prudishness of her Scandinavian mind, she had resented this man's comments on her person. She had had a feeling of nakedness somehow despite her modest clothes. Yet she had been incensed most of all because he had found her so deficient in that magic something called charm.

"But I understand colors and complexions," she had defended herself.

The great designer had laughed. "A child may know his letters and yet not understand Shakespeare," he had added somewhat drily.

Mr. Krantz did not rue his bargain. When he advertised his ability to get the season's first styles through his own designer, his business had increased in leaps and bounds.

Elizabeth also found herself more and more pleased with the Hebrew gentleman and was made aware of his goodwill when he later secured for her a contract with two blouse factories. This only meant a few days' work at the beginning of each season, but added a thousand dollars to her income.

In her second summer with Krantz all her debt to him was cancelled and she was free to accept as many contracts as she could handle. She was fascinated with the work. The flying trips to the various Eastern cities appealed to her and she was so busy that there was no time to brood.

When she had returned from her first adventurous journey, the Johnsons and even her own family had stood just a little bit in awe of her. Finna frankly admitted that she had not known just how to treat such a lady. But she very soon put them all at ease again. Elizabeth was not superficial. She had made up her mind to learn the art of dress because it had been pointed out to her as a part of her duty and being at heart kind, it had not been so difficult to acquire a gracious courtesy once her shyness was conquered. In spite of her own improvement she saw no deficiency in her own people. She loved them and all their ways were dear, indeed doubly dear after having been away from them so long.

Her immediate family was very proud of her, especially Thor, who had always adored her. But she was a little amused at her sister's attitude. For the first time in her life Ninna had sought to cultivate Elizabeth's viewpoint and had ceased to patronize her. Yet there was a reservation in her admiration for this new Elizabeth. It was pleasant to hear the girls tell her how lovely they thought her sister, but it was humiliating also to recognize that her power to patronize her was at an end. For Elizabeth, though she was unaware of it, had adopted the only method in which it is possible to combat and defeat a vain and beautiful woman, when she had put on the impregnable armor of pretty clothes and an easy manner. A woman whose popularity lies in her beauty

has no fear whatever of a reformer nor of a saint, nor yet a genius. She fears only an Eve as artful as herself.

Elizabeth understood this partly, for, ever since she had come out of her own silly dreams, she had acquired a deeper interest in people and affairs and through her observation had learned much. She knew instinctively that Ninna resented the change in her, just as she herself had once resented Ninna's loveliness.

All through the intervening months Elizabeth had been trying to subdue her spite at this pretty little sister. She had told herself a thousand times that after all it had been no fault of Ninna's that Balder had loved her. But she had not been back very long before she learned that Ninna was far from constant. Her mother had hinted as much in her letters and Elizabeth learned it well enough later for herself.

One warm autumn day Elizabeth sat out on the porch with her mother. She had just come home for a few days' rest. Borga was knitting a sweater for Thor and her daughter was reading a magazine. Elizabeth was, in actuality, thinking of other things and most often her mind flew to Ninna. For just that morning, while shopping in town, she had overheard some gossip about her.

"Mamma, does Ninna ever speak of Balder?"

Borga glanced from under drooping lids at her daughter's face. She was not deceived by the calmness of her voice but she was pleased at the reserve of her manner.

"You know she tells us very little, my dear, but—she still hears from him regularly. Poor boy! I declare sometimes the sight of his letters hurts me."

"There is a lot of talk about Edward Cunningham."

"Oh, we know it, Elizabeth. We are so ashamed, her father and I! But what can we do? Then there is that nice doctor following her like a shadow. . . . I tell you, Elizabeth," Borga's voice was bitter, "I sometimes feel as if I hated her . . . my own flesh and blood. I'm almost ashamed to go to town!"

"Poor Balder!" Elizabeth's voice was soft like the voice of a mother above a sleeping child. "He's working so hard and the way is so difficult . . . and it's all for her."

Borga clicked her needles noisily. She was not so sure but that it served him right. "Life is very strange. The older I grow the more I notice it. It seems that when material comforts come a thousand other worries crop up . . . infidelities, misery over petty things, faithlessness. Yes, life is indeed very strange."

That evening Ninna remained at home. Borga knew that this meant she had invited someone out to the farm. She was not mistaken. After supper Ninna came into the kitchen.

"I wish you'd put on something decent, mother. The Cunninghams are bringing a friend from Winnipeg out here this evening."

Borga's cheek darkened a little. She was beginning to understand that Ninna was ashamed of her homely old-fashioned ways, but she was too proud to defend herself and too hurt to wish to comply with any of Ninna's overtures.

"I'm quite well enough in this dress," she answered stiffly.

Ninna looked at her, shrugged insolently and went out again.

Elizabeth was dumbfounded. It had somehow never occurred to her to criticise her mother. She looked at her now as with new eyes and grew very angry at her sister. This tall woman, so dignified in her plain cotton dress, with her strong grave face which, nevertheless, had lines of humor in it, and with about her an air of reserve power, was a woman any child might be proud to call mother. Yet Ninna was evidently ashamed of her. Borga met Elizabeth's angry eyes and burst into laughter.

"The hen that mothered a peacock must have felt something like I do. Poor little Ninna! She's so afraid I might shock the Cunninghams. Grandfather Cunningham was a travelling tinker in the Old Country—told papa so himself.

But his son is an insurance agent and Edward, when sober, follows in his footsteps. But I am just a farmer's wife and, what's still worse, an Iclander."

"Oh, mamma, she should be spanked!"

Borga rinsed out her coffee can, wiped it carefully and set it away in the warming closet. "Oh, well, she will be, Elizabeth. We all are, sooner or later. Life spans us all."

Ninna introduced her friends to Elizabeth effusively. Elizabeth liked none of them. Edward was an effeminate weakling who thought to prove his manliness by his vices; Lottie, a frivolous, rather bored young woman, and the friend from Winnipeg, a pompous fat youth who talked continually of money.

"And how's your lame fiddler now?" Lottie asked Ninna in the course of the evening.

Elizabeth felt her face scorching. She glanced at her sister angrily. Ninna was lounging in an easy chair, her dainty feet stretched out before her and her shining head nestling against the dark green of the upholstery. She laughed gaily and made a little grimace.

"Oh, just the same as ever, I guess."

The fat young man pretended to be horrified that one so desirable should even think of fiddlers.

"That's what I tell her," Lottie went on, "especially with a rich young doctor crazy about her."

Elizabeth made an excuse and went out. Their cheapness, their vulgarity sickened her. "And she dares to make light of him to such creatures," she said to herself. Her whole heart went out to him afresh; everything which she had tried to forget rushed to her mind again: the idealism of his clean young mind, his thousand and one confidences and the magic spell of his beautiful music. She suffered for him in anticipation of what he would have to endure. She knew so well the extremes of his nature. The exultation and the gloom, the sensitiveness and the morbidness, alternate joyousness and sadness. She understood that whether Ninna

proved faithful or faithless, she was destined to hurt him terribly. Elizabeth learned in that hour a more poignant suffering than sorrow for one's self—the dread lest any ill befall the beloved. To be wounded is hard for a woman to endure, but to cause pain is a still greater misery. It is a crime against the mother nature dormant in every good woman's heart. To Elizabeth, Ninna appeared at that moment as a kind of monster. Try though she would, she could not understand her.

Late that night she tapped at her sister's bedroom door and entered. Ninna was sitting before her dresser, her golden curls in a confused jumble about her shoulders, her little high-arched bare feet peeping out from under her white nightgown. She looked as sweet and innocent as some child from out the pages of a fairy book. Elizabeth sat down on the bed.

"Ninna, what about Doctor Whitman?"

Ninna twisted her hair into a grotesque knot at the back of her head, but even then she was pretty.

"I might marry him if I wasn't so afraid he'd get fat."

"And Edward?" There was scorn in Elizabeth's voice.

Her sister giggled and rubbed her little nose with cold cream.

"Edward isn't even a man. Don't worry about him. Go on—why don't you ask me about Balder? That's what you really want to know."

Elizabeth flushed. "Well, then, what of him?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. . . . He is the ace I keep up my sleeve. . . . It all depends on the game."

"Ninna, you are frightful! Don't you realize your selfishness? Don't you consider him at all?"

Ninna yawned. "Run along now, darling; I'm sleepy." Then, more dryly, "As far as I can see, Beta, dear, it's a case of eat or be eaten with a man. I prefer not to be eaten, that's all. Now, good-night."

CHAPTER XXVIII

WOMAN DISPOSES

Their tricks and craft hae put me daft,
They've ta'en me in, an a' that;
But clear your decks, and here's "the Sex!"
I like the jades for a' that.

—Burns.

Ninna was growing restless. She had outgrown the little town and outworn whatever sentiments she once had entertained for it. She had made several visits to Winnipeg and sighed for its wider fields. But she had also some of Cæsar's philosophy. It still remained a question whether it were not better to be "first in an Iberian village than second in Rome." Then, too, it was becoming difficult to manage her love-lorn swains. Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham blamed her unreasonably for Edward's dissipation. The wife of the tenor singer in the Methodist church swore that Ninna had bewitched her husband, and Doctor Whitman persisted in proposing to her every week.

She turned these things over in her mind as she cantered to town one morning on the fleet little pony she had bought herself that spring. The previous night she had received a glowing letter from Balder. He was now a regular member of the great symphony and had a class of students at the conservatory. The conductor of the symphony encouraged him in his compositions and prophesied a great future for him. They were expecting a renowned critic to visit the city in a few months and then Balder intended, if possible, to get an interview. On the whole the letter rather bored

her; his recent letters all had. She had expected him to take the world by storm long since. But he had been gone over two years and was still waiting for opportunity and now teaching stupid children.

When she entered the office she found Doctor Whitman pacing the floor impatiently.

"What's the matter, doctor, dear? Did you accidentally give someone poison?"

He whirled on her angrily, "I've just had a visit from your friend Edward Cunningham." The way he said it implied an infamy.

"Poor dear! I can sympathise with you—awful bore, isn't he?" She hung up her hat quite unperturbed.

The doctor groaned. "Ninna, I believe you are a devil!" Then before she could elude him, he caught her in his arms. She was a little startled at the suddenness of the attack, but not at all alarmed. She marked the heavy beating of his heart and his labored breathing as one takes note of some new symptom of a baffling disease. It rather amused her, but no more. For Ninna was endowed with the stoutest shield a woman can possess—an unimpassioned nature.

The doctor poured out his heart above her golden head. He appealed to her mercy and he reviled her callousness; he wished her dead and wanted her love forever. Then, when he released her from his arms again, with contrite and humble apologies, he found her as impassive and cool as if nothing unusual had transpired.

"Now see what you've done to my hair," was all that she said.

He stared at her, new madness taking possession of him. He would have welcomed abuse and understood tears, but this passionless creature of such soft and tender flesh! He had a primitive desire to beat her, to inflict upon her some torture, to see her cringe and to hear her cry. He caught her roughly by the arm, his fingers digging so deep into the silky flesh that she winced. It delighted him and he tight-

ened his hold. Then she flung up her head, meeting his look boldly, and in her lazy amber eyes was a certain glitter that made him shudder. He gazed at her in fascination.

"Oh, Ninna, Ninna! You must love me! You must! Say that you do!" He shook her fiercely. "Before I go crazy and kill someone. Make up your mind either to marry me, or keep away from here altogether!"

She had been thinking swiftly. She wondered if it were not best, after all, to marry the doctor and so settle all her difficulties. He was good-looking. He was kind and generous. His practice was excellent—she had seen to that—and, she liked him. His hold upon her arm slackened. She shook his hand off, rubbing the red rings that made a bracelet on the whiteness of her arm.

"Now that I have such good proof of your devotion, I think I will," she told him in a calm, slow, matter-of-fact voice.

Poor Doctor Whitman! What need to record his follies. That little bruised arm occupied him distressingly until his first patient arrived. And perhaps never was patient less desired.

That afternoon when Ninna slipped to the postoffice she received a letter from Thor, inviting her to a dance that the Icelandic students were to give at Manitoba Hall the following week.

She was delighted. In the excitement of planning the trip all thought of her engagement receded into the background. She had intended telling her mother about it, but now decided that there was really no especial point in so doing.

"I think I'll go this Saturday and buy myself a dress in Winnipeg. Elizabeth can help me get something decent for once," she informed Borga that night.

"Well, yes, I suppose so," her mother answered, somewhat absently. She had long since given up disagreeing with her younger daughter in affairs that were her own.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LURE OF TINSEL

While men have eyes, or cars, or taste,
She'll always find a lover.

—Burns.

Finna was singing happily to herself and frying dough-nuts. She was a very happy woman these days and, indeed, why not? Her Einar, who had been so ill with pneumonia in the winter, was now quite strong again and had gained five pounds, as she proudly bragged to everyone. Then her Tomi was so smart! "What with this building boom going on and men almost fighting with one another to buy houses, it's rich we'll be—with nothing to do at all but wait for the grave, and that's a fact!" she told Mrs. Fjelstad one rainy day when that lady visited her.

Business was indeed feverish and fortunes were being made and lost over night in Winnipeg and all through the West. Tomi had gained a good deal of money buying and selling real estate and had induced his conservative father to invest a little capital also with surprising results. It was beginning to look as if the lean years were at an end and that all the golden prophecies made to the Icelandic pioneer were about to materialize.

All this business was a stimulus to amusements and frivolities, which in turn meant golden days for tailors and dress-makers. Elizabeth had as much to do as she could possibly manage and financially she was more than independent. She could easily have paid Thor's way now, but that young man preferred to go on "his own hook" as he expressed it.

Borga had been very proud of him that past summer when he had gone to the River settlement as teacher in the little school where he and his sisters had first learned their letters. And he had written that it was funny teaching Runa's babies, "for I can never forget how she used to boss me."

And now he was back with his Finna, and Elizabeth also was back for a few weeks. Therefore Finna sang happily as she fried the doughnuts which all her children loved so well. Her son came home and went upstairs to change his clothes, for it was Saturday and he had the half day off. She had just removed the pan of hot fat from the fire, setting it away carefully, and was grinding coffee when the door-bell rang.

"Well, picture it now, if it isn't Ninna! But it's not till next week we expected you!"

Ninna set her little grip down, kissed Finna's hot face, and laughed merrily.

"I know, but I wanted to surprise you and to get a new dress. Is Elizabeth home?"

"Well, no, dearie, not just this minute, but she'll be back soon. It's just a bit of coffee I was grinding. It's yourself must have smelled it."

"M-m!" Ninna sniffed the air. "I smell doughnuts. No one makes doughnuts like Aunt Finna."

"Now hear the child! But come with me if it's not asking too much that you see such an untidy kitchen. Tomi, Tomi! Come down this minute. It's Ninna Lindal we have for a visitor."

Up in his room Tomi muttered something very impolite. He had never liked Ninna when he was a boy, and he still cared very little for her. Her pretty wiles had no effect upon him, consequently there was little love lost between them.

And Finna, for all her open-heartedness, nursed a little grudge against her. She would never forgive her for appro-

priating Balder. Then to her simple mind it also seemed almost a sin to be so beautiful. "Sure and no good can come of it," she had confided to her Einar; "if it was with modesty she tried to live it down! But such boldness!" Then for once her Einar disappointed her. "Well, now, mamma, she's a sweet little thing—a winsome wee thing," he had parried. To which the good Finna had sniffed disdainfully and, sotto voce, consoled herself: "Just as I've always said; they're all blind as moles—blind as moles, poor things!"

Ninna had changed her suit for one of the billowy dresses which so became her. It was pale green and out of it her golden head rose like a woodland flower from its slender stock. She was doing her best to beguile the placid Tomi, but though he laughed at her sallies and humored her criticisms, he was not in the slightest enamored of her charms. She knew it and it piqued her. She was just wondering what was the way to this stupid man's heart when a very big and very luxurious-looking car drew up to the curb. Tomi leaped up and ran outside. Ninna saw from the window that a middle-aged and faultlessly dressed man got out of the car and entered the yard. She made up her mind to learn more of the gentleman. The make of his car pleased her; even the Calhouns had no such car.

She opened the door softly and slipped out to the porch. The stranger was in animated conversation with Tomi. She kicked the door with her little foot. The gentleman looked up, as she had intended, and saw her there in her little green dress with the late sunshine dancing in her beautiful hair. He forgot what he had been saying.

"My Lord! Who is she?" He caught Tomi's arm excitedly. Tomi introduced them. That was all Ninna needed.

In half an hour she had Mr. Armstrong almost bewitched. It was with an effort that he concluded his business with Tomi.

"I wonder if I might ask you to come for a little spin

some time? Mr. Johnson, there, can tell you that I'm quite respectable," he told her in parting.

Ninna clapped her hands gleefully. "Oh, I'd like to!"

"How about to-morrow evening then?" he suggested.

She hesitated a second as though to consider, but really to give him an opportunity to study the length of her drooping lashes.

"Why, yes, I suppose that will be all right, if the weather is good."

When the car whirled away, she giggled. "Who is he, Tom?"

"A very big contractor." He snapped the words out. He was thinking of Elizabeth and Balder and wondering why they had been cursed with any such being as this fluffy, red-headed Ninna anyway. She discerned his resentment.

"Poor old Tom! You don't like me, do you? Well, never mind," she slipped her hand under his arm, "is he married? Is he rich? And where does he live?"

Tom didn't want to talk to her, but escape was impossible. "No! He's not married. . . . Good Lord! Would you have gone out with him if he had been?" The words were explosive as he uttered them.

"I don't know. Why worry, since he isn't? Go on—question number two—is he rich?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Tom, don't bark!"

"And he lives in Fort Rouge with his family," he snapped as he entered the house.

Ninna's visit stretched beyond three weeks, every day bringing her imploring letters from Doctor Whitman and almost every day finding her in the company of Mr. Armstrong.

Not always did she allow him to call for her at the Johnsons. She was afraid of Elizabeth and Thor, and so feigned little errands and shopping trips where he could meet her at the "Bay" or Robinson's, or at that amazing new store of

Eaton's. But both Thor and Elizabeth knew how she spent her time and were displeased with her.

The night before Ninna was to leave for home, Elizabeth found her sitting pensively beside the window, with a letter in her lap, when she went up to the little room they were sharing at Finna's. She had never seen Ninna in such a mood before. Her small face looked very white in the moonlight. There was a droop of the full red lips which was unfamiliar. Elizabeth wondered if it were possible that she had been crying. Ninna had seldom cried even as a child. There had always been a certain rugged bravery behind her light-heartedness.

"Ninna, are you ill?"

She opened her eyes, looking at Elizabeth unwaveringly.

"No." There was just a faint wavering in the soft voice. . . . "I have been at a funeral." She made a little fluttering movement with her hands. Elizabeth looked at her in amazement and strangely enough thought of a bird she had once found dying in the woods. The vain little efforts of its wings had been like that.

"Beta, I'm going to marry Mr. Armstrong. I'm in earnest. . . . You may believe me."

There was something in the little face, in her soft, slow voice, which tugged at Elizabeth's heartstrings. She flung herself to her knees beside Ninna and for the first time in many years gathered the lovely little body close in her arms.

"Little sister, little sister, you don't mean it! You can't love him! Why, you hardly know him. Oh, Ninna, Ninna, what of Balder!"

She burrowed her head for a moment in the curve of Elizabeth's shoulder, then pushed her gently away.

"Listen, Elizabeth. This is what I know of him. He is thirty-eight, he has a great deal of money. He is proud of his houses and his dogs. He wants a pretty wife that he may be proud of her also. I am quite decided to be that wife."

Elizabeth felt woefully helpless. She was quite certain that Ninna needed to be defended against some evil.

"But are you sure that you will be happy?"

"He has irreproachable table manners," Ninna replied with a little cynical ring in her voice.

Elizabeth stared at her, miserably conscious of the futility of her pleas; then she got up to go. As she did she caught sight of the letter Ninna had been reading. It had fluttered unnoticed to the floor. She felt as if someone had dealt her a blow. It was from Balder.

CHAPTER XXX

THE FEET OF CLAY

A statue lay stark at my feet,
Dead to the finger tips,
A darkness hung in the lengths of her hair
And shadowed her perjured lips.

—*T. B. Aldrich.*

Mr. Armstrong had not made many visits to the Lindal farm before the little town of Caldwell was buzzing with this new bit of gossip. The over-joyous doctor had told his friends the Calhouns of his engagement to Miss Lindal, and it was not likely that they would remain silent concerning the stranger's visit. But Doctor Whitman refused to believe his Ninna faithless. To be sure, had the town not buzzed before, and had it not been mistaken?

And for once in her life Ninna played coward. She was not happy in her deception, yet she had not the courage to tell the doctor the truth. She hoped against hope that some less difficult way would present itself and, as usual, she was favored. Early in December Doctor Whitman received word that his mother, living in Ontario, was dangerously ill. He had to leave almost immediately, getting a young medical graduate from Winnipeg to take charge of his office in the meantime.

His parting with Ninna was pathetic. He hated to leave her, she seemed so precious. There was about her, too, a certain melancholy which he attributed to her love for him, but which was in reality remorse for her duplicity. She was

surprised to find herself clinging to his arm and crying foolishly when the train thundered up to the dingy depot.

It was quite dusk and they were standing apart from the small group awaiting the passenger train. He caught the sound of her sobs and could have died for the love of her. It was dreadful to leave her, but ineffably sweet to have this memory of her tenderness to carry away.

"Oh, don't think altogether ill of me! Not altogether ill of me. . . . I—Oh, you are so good!" Poor Ninna was quite incoherent.

His devotion for the first time touched her. She hated to have him go and grew panicky lest he should not. She felt as if she were in a strange and terrible dream. She had not thought conscience could be such a relentless and real power.

As for the doctor, he gathered her into his arms regardless of the bystanders. Her tears, her incoherence, her soft loveliness, were to him as nectar and ambrosia. He felt like a monarch of some Elysian kingdom when he entered the train.

Ninna informed her parents the following week that she was to marry Mr. Armstrong in the spring. They had nothing to say. Indeed, much as they sympathised with Doctor Whitman, their pronounced feeling was, perhaps, thankfulness that she had at last taken some definite stand.

That night as Mrs. Lindal combed out her long hair, she said as much to her husband. He was sitting on the edge of the bed removing his boots.

"It seems so strange, mamma, . . . she was such a sweet little baby! . . . Do you remember how she used to hold out her arms to me? And make that funny little face?"

"Yes, Bjorn, I remember."

He sighed. "Well, I hope she'll be happy. . . . We'll not see much of her now, mamma."

"No . . . not much, I'm afraid."

They entered that silence which the long-married know so well—that strange silence where the unspoken thought is

clear and tangible. They were both back in the years when their children had romped about them innocently and happily. The poignant sweetness of those years was more real to them now than it had then been.

"See, Bjorn," there was a quaver in Borga's voice. She held out a grey hair. "I am growing old. . . . This is a sign of autumn. Soon the children will have fluttered all away, like leaves in the wind. . . ."

He drew her down beside him, his calloused hands brushing back the thick brown hair from her saddened face.

"You are as young to me as the night we searched for Thiassi's eyes. Winter won't be so chill, I'm thinking, with you and me together, Borga."

Ninna spent that Christmas in Winnipeg with the Armstrongs. Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong thought her very charming and forgave her her poverty because of her beauty. They could see that she would make a very decorative and pleasing wife for their son. Miss Armstrong, the only daughter, was a rather plain spinster, who read Browning and was partial to foreign missions. She wove a most fantastic and wonderful tale around her brother's love affair, relating it with enjoyment in a dreamy, languid voice at afternoon teas. She indulged in so many fancies about Ninna's romance that eventually they all became real to her and Ninna herself acquired added glamor in her eyes.

Once her shallow remorse was over, Ninna was delighted with her choice. The comfort and beauty of the Armstrong home were not to be lightly valued. Then, too, it pleased her vanity when the timid little maid nodded a curtsy and obeyed her behest. And it was more than delightful to roll through the whitened streets in her fiancé's luxurious motor.

But there is always a fly in the ointment. She was in terror lest these folks take it into their heads to visit the farm. She thought that Mrs. Armstrong would be less inclined to favor her if she saw how humble were her own

people. It was not so hard to explain that "father was a successful farmer," but it would be terrible to have Mrs. and Miss Armstrong see him sitting down to a meal in the big bare kitchen, in his shirt sleeves! She was quite aware that where love might have blinded the eyes of Mr. Armstrong junior to these terrible deficiencies, no such veil would hide their crudeness from his womenkind.

As a matter of fact neither Mr. nor Mrs. Armstrong had the slightest idea of discrediting Mr. Lindal because he was a farmer. Their own parents had been Eastern pioneers and they were very proud of it.

Ninna had put off writing Doctor Whitman of her forthcoming marriage until she learned that his mother was recovering. Then, in a fright, lest he return, creating scandal before she had safely escaped to Winnipeg, she forced herself to write. She received one letter in return from him, which she had the grace not to read, but returned unopened. Later she heard that he was not coming back for several months and that his young substitute was to stay on in his place. After that she dismissed the doctor from her mind and breathed freely once again.

She went to Winnipeg early in April to get her trousseau made. The Armstrongs wanted her to stay with them, but Elizabeth had just returned from one of her many Eastern trips and was back at the Johnsons. Ninna thought it wiser, therefore, to stay with her sister.

One evening they were up in their little room and Ninna was happily trying on various dainty negligees and other articles of feminine adornment.

"Beta, you were a darling to bring me these."

Elizabeth was indulgent. She was finding it a very entrancing game to dress her pretty sister. It was like decking a little doll.

"Wait until you try your dress to-morrow. Krantz says there never has been one more lovely made in his store.

How delighted mamma will be seeing you in it. Poor mother, she never had a wedding dress."

Ninna felt uncomfortable. She had a confession to make and dreaded doing so.

"I . . . that is we . . . the Armstrongs, you know, . . . think it foolish for me to be married at Caldwell. They want the wedding here at their house."

"Why, Ninna! Mamma is planning on having us all home for that day, and, if possible, Sjera Bjarni to hold the service. Surely you're not going to deprive her of that little joy, are you?"

Ninna tapped the floor with an impatient little foot. "How glad I'll be to get away from all these eternal reproaches," she thought.

"Now, Elizabeth, it's no use arguing. I'm not going to be married in any out-of-the-way place to please anyone. How can you expect the Armstrongs to go out there?"

Elizabeth controlled her temper.

"Oh, well, perhaps you are right. But I had better get mother a suit then if she is to come here, and father should have a spring ulster."

Ninna folded and unfolded a silky underbodice with hands that were not quite firm.

"I . . . don't suppose . . . papa can be bothered coming . . . he's so busy in springtime."

Elizabeth stared at her sister with widening pupils. She was speechless for a time as the knowledge of what Ninna intimated dawned upon her. Then there flared up in her the fiery anger of slow natures. She was toying with a pair of long white kid gloves—elegant French gloves brought from New York for her sister's wedding. Swift and terrible she crossed the room to her side and, with the gloves which had cost her a pretty sum, struck Ninna a stinging blow across the face.

"You . . . you vain puppet. Never speak to me again!"

Trembling in every limb, she ran from the room.

Ninna remained quite motionless for a long time, one rosy palm held against her face. One might have supposed something precious were cupped in that hand. Philosophically she stepped to the mirror and studied herself. She shrugged, picked up a bottle of witch hazel and applied it to her cheek.

"Elizabeth, my dear, that blow has eased my conscience," she said. Then quite calmly began packing her clothes.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SINGING RIVER

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth I knew not where. . . .
—Longfellow.

Ninna was married in May in St. Stephen's church, with an elaborate reception afterward at the Armstrong home. Elizabeth mailed the newspaper clippings, with their flatteries and many pictures, to her parents. Not one of her family had been there. To the Lindals, Ninna was dead.

But Balder's letters kept coming to the farm for her. Borga thought best, therefore, to send on the clippings to him. It was the most efficient way to explain Ninna's actions. Surely he would see by those extravagant articles how she had sold herself for the fleshpots.

That same afternoon Elizabeth came home for a hurried visit. She tried to be home as much as possible now; it was her way of proving sympathy. Her heart ached for her parents, yet perhaps most for her father, for she knew how dearly he had adored his capricious younger daughter. Her parents understood and were happy in her love.

She was full of excitement when she burst into her mother's sunny kitchen.

"Mamma, what do you think? I called at Sjera Bjarni's this morning to see how he was, and a letter had just come from Balder. He is to have a chance to play his own composition as a solo the night the symphony open their engagement and the great Bernardi will be there. It is the opportunity he has been waiting for."

Borga was delighted. He had almost the same claim upon her interest as had her own children. Then she remembered the letter she had just sent off.

"Mercy me, Elizabeth! What have I done! Oh, I hope the boy won't get it until after the concert."

"What, mother? What do you mean?"

Borga threw up her hands. "I just mailed him the notices of Ninna's wedding—he had to learn it sooner or later, poor boy."

Elizabeth flew into a panic. "Oh, mamma, I wish you hadn't! He is sure to get it. It will ruin his chance! Oh, how terrible, how terrible! What isn't her selfishness leading-to? You know how temperamental he is," she wailed.

Borga sighed wearily. "I know, I know. But let us hope for the best."

Elizabeth was much too troubled; she saw a thousand terrible tragedies. He would refuse to play. He would break his violin in anger and throw ambition to the winds, or he might even kill himself. She rushed back to Winnipeg the next day and hurried to the minister's wife. She frightened good Frau Haldora shamefully when she dashed into the house unannounced and came running into her tiny study quite breathless.

After a few moments of puzzled listening, she understood what Elizabeth was explaining so wildly.

"You think he'll get the news before he is to play—is that it?"

"Oh, yes, yes. . . . You know how he will suffer. He will never do his best. . . . Why, it may make him ill. His whole ambition is wrapped up in her. He may not even play at all."

Frau Haldora pushed her spectacles up on her wrinkled old forehead and laid down a grey sock she had been knitting.

"Sit down and be sensible. Don't talk to me about ambition and pretty sweethearts. Balder is a genius. You could

not divide him from his music. . . . It is his soul; it is stronger than himself. This is what he needs. Now he will have something vital to put into that harmony of his."

A week from that day the whole of musical Boston flocked to hear the opening concert of the symphony. The program announced that a promising Canadian violinist was to play his first composition, a powerful imaginative piece called "The Thrush and the Singing River." Those who were most interested in musical affairs turned the leaves of their programs. Yes, there it was following the Largo, fifth on the program.

Conductor Eduarde was terrified when Balder entered the dressing-room at the back of the theatre. He was ghastly white and his eyes had a filmed appearance.

"Good God, Fjelstad! You're not sick?"

Balder shook his head, flung himself down on a box, and stared at the floor.

The old conductor wondered if it were possible that he was suffering from stage fright.

"Surely you're not afraid to play for Bernardi?"

Balder passed his hand across his eyes. "Why, I . . . I haven't been thinking of him."

The old man grew angry. He had a violent temper. He had heard of young artists almost broken by their terror when a long-hoped-for opportunity had been given them. He did not intend to have this happen to Balder. He had staked his professional judgment upon his genius.

"I would not have believed you a coward!" He hurled out the words sharply.

Balder shrank as if from a blow. He leaped to his feet. "Be careful, Mr. Eduarde!"

The conductor laughed. He rejoiced in the angry light which had rekindled the life in Balder's eyes. "That's better; that's better," he muttered, rubbing his hands to-

gether and going back stage, where the other musicians were now coming in.

Balder looked after him angrily. "Darn idiot! What does he think I am, a fool?"

Mr. Eduarde labored under the delusion that stage fright had caused Balder his apparent distress, and though he kept congratulating himself that he had dispelled that fear by arousing his anger, he nevertheless watched the stage uneasily when the fifth number was announced, and he almost groaned when Balder made his appearance. The entire audience leaned forward, so to speak, their curiosity wide awake. He came across the stage haltingly, his slight limp more noticeable because of his lagging walk. His lean face was drained of all color, and out of it his black eyes burned like coals. Old Mr. Eduarde glanced at him again fearfully and then drew a breath of relief. This was not fear. That mouth was too grim, those eyes were not filmed now. It was more like hypnotism. He raised his baton and Balder launched into the beautiful prelude.

The old conductor had heard the piece played many times, yet he could hardly believe his ears. It was the same, yet how different! Here was agony that rent the heart! Here was joy that gave wings to the flesh! And, as Balder played on, the old man knew that where this music had been a mere creation before, it was now a living thing—a tangible something with a soul which would live on forever.

For a moment after Balder finished there was a silence more impressive than applause, but he seemed scarcely aware of his audience. Then the whole house broke into a pandemonium of appreciation. Again and again he played for them, until it was no longer possible to suspend the rest of the program. But Mr. Eduarde knew that the interest of the house was not to be reclaimed in any great measure again that evening. Balder was what they wanted. Balder had won his laurels.

After the performance the famous Bernardi came to the

dressing-room to offer Balder a contract to tour the United States and Canada. When he named the figure he proposed paying for the first year, Balder sat down hastily. It seemed incredible. And in addition to this, his composition would bring him a round sum, the critic announced.

Conductor Eduarde was in a seventh heaven.

"I knew it, I knew it, my boy! But how I trembled for you when I saw you in that stage fright," he said to Balder, after Bernardi left.

Balder laughed, bitterness in his voice. "It wasn't stage fright, Conductor Eduarde, that I got. . . . It was a kick," he answered his astonished master, and then went home.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHOM GOD HATH JOINED

As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman:
Though she bends him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows;
Useless each without the other!

—*Longfellow.*

It was indeed well that, as Fru Haldora had said, Balder's very soul was inseparable from his music. It was fortunate also that he was left with but little time on his hands in which to brood, for the impatient Bernardi expected swift and immediate action on the part of his chosen artiste. Balder was to be ready to make his first appearance as a concert artist in September. There was much for him to do in the meantime.

Yet, however hard one may labor, pain has a way of claiming the heart at every unguarded moment. Not all men have a like capacity for love nor yet the same ability to discard sorrow. With all the fervor of his artistic soul Balder had worshipped Ninna. The bird upon the bough sang of her. The golden butterflies that dropped so dizzily above the scarlet roses brought tender thoughts of her. The play of light upon the summer leaves and the white beam of evening stars on spotless snows alike embodied her. A mother, passing him in a crowd, with soft eyes and a baby clasped to her breast, and young lovers that loitered unnecessarily close along the dust-enveloped street—these, too, recalled her poignantly.

To be an artist one must possess an intense heart and an

excess of imagination. But since these two needs must be incorporated in frail flesh, they portend mistakes and suffering. In after years Balder learned to see that what he had so worshipped was not Ninna herself but a being of his own fancy. At the time of his disillusionment, however, he had no philosophic comfort.

Something sweet had forever gone from life (a dream, perhaps, but men have died for dreams) and was no more to be regained forever. The years may bring wisdom and wisdom in turn may bring consolation, but the heart that has learned to be temperate has lost the love of the stars. And Balder, whose nature was fretted in the common levels, found it bitter indeed to relinquish his pretty dream.

Then, too, with his extremes of temperament, his tenderness and hot resentments, he could no more be just to Ninna's weakness than he had been temperate in her praise. She was an Iphigenia turned Sapho, a Judith become a Magdalene. He painted her so black that he shuddered at the thought of her. And then always, like the sun breaking through a gloomy cloud, the sweet winsomeness and utter loveliness of her broke upon him afresh. Altogether it was good that his work claimed him for the largest part of his time.

As his friend and old-time teacher had prophesied, he threw all the burden of his disappointment, all the woe of his foolish young heart, into his music. He played until it seemed the very walls about him must agonize with his sorrow and until he himself wept for himself and so, unconsciously, administered the best panacea to his artistic and temperamental soul.

As may be imagined, the news of his success brought very real gladness to his friends, and to his mother an inexplicable sense of gratitude to the God of common folk. She was proud and she was humbled; she had been so weak, so faithless, and God had been so good.

Balder's tour was more than a success. His praises were

sung in every paper. He was banqueted and entertained by the musical clubs of every city. He was asked countless questions concerning himself, to all of which he replied that there was nothing to tell of but work. But no one believed him. "His personality is so striking," the ladies declared; "he's so handsome . . . and so sad. . . . Surely there must be a mystery of some kind connected with him. There must be!" The public like to dress their favorites for themselves. Balder's manager was well aware of this and encouraged all the press gossip. Balder might have been in danger of becoming merely popular had he been less a real musician.

Early in the new year he wrote his mother that at last he would have time to come to see her. His final concert was to be at Toronto in February. After that he would come home for a few weeks.

Mrs. Fjelstad was almost beside herself with joy, and the rest of Balder's friends looked forward with eagerness to his visit. His countrymen were planning to join in doing him honor, and altogether his forthcoming visit had fired the whole Icelandic populace with pride and an eagerness to welcome him.

He came at last, on a March morning, when the whole city of Winnipeg was windswept and torn. Mrs. Fjelstad and Miss Thompson shivered as they waited for the train. But when he came toward them, his face eager, his step buoyant and about him an air of conscious power, they forgot the unfriendly storm. The wet snow flew in flaky eddies about them, but when they were caught in turn into his lonely arms, the inclement weather had no longer any power to cause them discomfort.

What a time they had that day! Mrs. Olafson had insisted that the whole house be at Mrs. Fjelstad's disposal. It was unthinkable not to entertain him to the best of their united powers.

When the two happy women led him up the path to the

big grey house, both Mrs. Olafson and her daughter were at the door to bid him welcome; to wait upon him; to spy out his pleasures, as only an Iclander can. For, though the people of the tiny northern island claim only to reverence ten commandments, yet there is an unwritten one—perhaps the least sinned against. It is this: Out of thine heart thou shalt be hospitable.

If Balder had been generous at Christmas, he was lavish now. His mother was horrified at his extravagance. Every foolish little vanity that he had seen other women wear, he had bought her. She wondered silently what on earth she would ever do with all those combs and pins and beaded pocketbooks, those gloves and hose and handkerchiefs. But Balder had another surprise for her. Somewhat bashfully he laid a small plush box in her lap.

"Your little songs bought that, mother," he told her.

With uncertain fingers she opened the little box, then quite foolishly broke down and wept. Balder laughed at her gaily. He picked up the beautiful brooch from its satin bed and pinned it on her breast. It was a tiny bird of beaten gold with wings tipped in pure diamonds.

"Your little thrush has found the singing river," he said.

Finna had almost roasted herself baking against Balder's visit. Her son teased her that she must expect an army or a host of beggars. But she had her own views about what was befitting so beloved a being. To her unalloyed delight, Mrs. Fjelstad had promised to bring him for dinner the first Sunday, and Finna hunted the markets for a turkey which she told the butchers had to be "fat and young, big and tender, and mind, now, that it's the truth you tell me!"

Elizabeth contended with many emotions. She wanted above all else to see him again; to hear his voice; to watch the play of feeling in his face. And yet she dreaded the meeting. She felt somehow that her sister's falseness would reflect upon her; that he would hate the sight of any of her

family. She knew also that it would not be exactly quieting to her own piece of mind to come face to face with him once more.

Balder refused to be treated as a guest. The very night of his arrival he rushed boyishly to Sjera Bjarni's, to the delight and gratification of his old benefactors. The following morning he told his mother that he just had to go and see his Aunt Finna. In vain his mother tried to explain that Mrs. Johnson expected them on the morrow for Sunday dinner.

"Oh, I know. She thinks I'm some great person now. . . . And it's this strange somebody she wants to entertain on Sunday. But it's her own Balder she is going to see this morning."

So it came about that Finna, in a floury apron and very hot and red as to face, ran reluctantly from a thin sheet of cookie dough which she was cutting out in four-leaf clovers, to the door and was lifted bodily from her feet by a tall fur-coated stranger.

"You smell just the same, dear little woman. . . . What is it, cake or doughnuts?"

"Oh, dear Lord! Is it my own lad! Picture it now how you scared me," her voice was tremulous. Then, meeting his eyes so frank, so boyish, she flung her fond old arms about him. "But it's myself that wanted to be so fine for my Balder. Me with a brand-new dress that my Elizabeth ordered. Such stylishness now you never would believe of your Finna. And, if you please, a gold chain from my Einar. But now look at me"—there was feigned reproach in her voice.

Balder threw off his coat. "Come on, Auntie; let's go into the kitchen. I know you're making something awfully good."

As Finna chatted away, giving him the latest news of almost everyone he knew, he sat in his old corner and thought of what a debt of kindness he owed this simple

unselfish woman. He thought, too, of Elizabeth, and her thousand generous acts came back to him. Really it was a shame the way he had neglected her. Good girl, was Elizabeth. Then he scowled. He wondered where her sister was.

Finna began to talk about Elizabeth. She told him of her wonderful success and of all that she had done for her parents.

"Why, her last cent her papa could have if he needed it. . . . And it's Krantz's own son she could have now if she wanted him," she concluded.

Balder underwent a peculiar feeling. He felt as if someone were shaking him with rude hands, tearing him from an unnatural sleep. Elizabeth married to someone! Why, it was unthinkable! He had always maintained an air of proprietorship over her. Somehow, now that he was back in his old environment—back, too, to a saner viewpoint—he recognized how much she had been part of his life.

"Why, Krantz is a Jew!" There was surprise and resentment in his voice.

Finna glanced at him sharply. "Well, it's not a sin to my way of thinking. And if I do say it, as oughtn't, it's more of my own countrymen I wish were like him, God bless him. To be sure he's a gay young man and so free with his chocolates."

Balder felt suddenly very cross. He gave Finna a dark look which she enjoyed in secret. She had just taken the last pan of fragrant cookies from the oven, and while she made ready to steep her ever-present coffee, he went into the front room, walking about the familiar place as if renewing friendship with it.

He heard the gate click and stepped to the window. A tall, slender girl in a jaunty little hat and a sleek seal coat was hurrying up the path. Why, it was Elizabeth! He forgot his boredom; excitement was taking possession of him. Why, he had not known he wanted so much to see her.

She stepped into the hall, shutting the door quickly behind her.

"Home, Auntie," she called, stamping the snow from her neat boots.

Her voice went through him like a chord of music. He had not remembered that it was so beautiful. She hung up her coat, and then as she turned saw him where he was coming toward the doorway. They stopped and stared at each other—he seeing only the supple slenderness of her, the piquant, charming face and her wide violet eyes, almost purple now in their intensity; and she, his dark face so well remembered, yet so much finer now in its added strength.

"Oh, Balder!" . . . What volumes are sometimes contained in a word.

They flew into each other's arms as if impelled by some irresistible, unseen power. He wondered if he had been blind and only now saw. He felt as if he had been imprisoned and now were freed again.

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth! What a fool I've been!"

"That you have, dearie," Finna answered him from the doorway, where she stood smiling at them through her tears.

"It's a good God we have, a good God, and that's a fact," she said to herself, going back to the kitchen, shutting the door behind her.

They were married quietly before he left again for the east. There was no fuss and no excitement, for she was determined that Sjera Bjarni should perform the ceremony, and he was not well enough to leave his home. But there was never perhaps a more beautiful wedding. All those whom she loved best were there gathered in the minister's homely parlor—just they and no more.

Thor, now a great splendid young man, was very solemn and very proud to be best man, and Margaret no less pleased to be bridesmaid. As the aged minister pronounced the solemn vows, Borga and Bjorn tightened their hold upon

each other's hands. This was somehow a renewal of their youth, a renewal of their vows. "Oh, God, be gracious," she prayed, and he, "Teach him to be kind."

Mrs. Fjelstad watched her son with tear-dimmed eyes, yet with a great happiness in her heart. She had learned to love this grave-eyed girl who was giving herself so gladly to her son.

They were all very serious until the ceremony ended. Then there was a storm of laughter, of good wishes, of merry entreaties and advice, with now and then a little shower of sweet tears.

"Picture it now! What a gladness, Mrs. Lindal, Mrs. Fjelstad! Picture it! Our babies all sound and married and her so good and him so famous. Begging your reverence pardon, Sjera Bjarni, but it's not so much happier I'm thinking I'll be in heaven," Finna told them, her kind old face beaming at them above her grand new dress and her golden chain.

CHAPTER XXXIII

INVISIBLE BONDS

Not yet, O love not yet; all is not true,
All is not ever as it seemeth now.
Soon shall the river take another blue,
Soon dies yon light upon the mountain brow.
What lieth dark, O love, bright day will fill?
Wait for thy morning, be it good or ill.
Not yet, O love, not yet.

—*Bret Harte.*

Thor had finished college and had decided to commence the study of medicine at Chicago in the fall. Borga insisted that he stay at home that summer. She had seen so little of him now for four years and would see little of him for yet a longer time once he had gone to the States.

He was glad enough to be home. It was delightful to roam the woods or help about the familiar farm and to settle down to the former companionship with his mother. She was so eager to have him talk, so interested in all his ideas. Once again they whiled away the long evenings by reading—wonderful books now, of poetry, of philosophy, of lives and letters. To Borga it was the wages of long years of monotony and labor. To him it was the joy of life.

One July day he was helping his mother pick over strawberries which she intended to can. It was very hot and Bjorn had ordered him in from the fields. He rebelled sometimes at what he called their tyranny.

"You seem to think I should rest with my feet on a cushion," he told them.

But Bjorn knew what it meant to his wife to have Thor around her these two weeks.

Thor was thinking of Winnipeg and the hot pavements as he picked the rosy fruit.

"Mother, I wish you'd ask Margaret out here. It's dreadful in town these hot days."

"So—my boy is already considering the health of the ladies," she teased him.

He grinned and slipped a handful of berries into his mouth. "Now, mother. . . . You know you'd like to have her."

Borga laughed. "Of course I'll ask her to come. Or, that is, you may ask her to come."

Thor caught at her apron, pulling her close. "You're the greatest mother a chap could have," he said.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Lindal liked Margaret. She was by now a teacher and had taught a primary grade in Winnipeg for the past year, but she still declared that the work did not appeal to her. There was about her a quiet, comforting manner. She seemed never hurried, never upset or out of humor. It was pleasant to be with her because she neither ruffled nor disturbed one's way of enjoying things. She possessed that most valuable gift of character, the ability to adapt herself to every place and circumstance.

Her very looks were consistent with her character. She was neither plain nor pretty, neither tall nor short. One hardly noticed these things about Margaret. That was what made her so comforting. An ugly woman did not feel ill at ease in her company and a pretty one might enjoy the experience of being natural, since there was no rivalry to dread from her. But she had a voice full and strangely deep for a woman—it was a very beautiful voice.

Thor and Margaret had never been conscious of any rare unusual romance. They had simply drifted slowly and naturally into one of those quiet and lasting affections which come upon one as does sleep. They had not been aware that

they loved each other and then all at once realized that somehow, without beginning and undoubtedly without end, they always had and always must do so. This is that love which "bears all things, suffers all things" and never is shaken. It is given to few to love so. It is a gift, like poetry and song. It is the supreme art of the soul.

That summer was very wonderful to them and very wonderful also to Bjorn and Borga. It seemed that Margaret was given them in place of that wilful child who had been so dear and who had left them in a manner more bitter than death.

Margaret had a way of discovering all Borga's likes and dislikes without direct questioning. She sympathised with her restricted views of religion and duty; she admired her taste in literature. She knew how she wanted her food seasoned and how she liked her coffee served. She never made the mistake of arranging anything in the house otherwise than it had been previous to her coming. She folded Borga's clothes the way Borga thought it should be done, and yet when it came to a matter of principle Margaret's grey eyes flashed a message of a strong and resolute mind. Borga was sometimes a little surprised that her son had been wise enough to center his affections upon so altogether desirable a girl. It seemed too good to be true.

The young people had their own plans and ideas. Many were the rosy futures they wove for themselves as they wandered through the fields or sat in the peaceful garden.

One evening, toward the end of Margaret's visit, they were sitting side by side on the little verandah. The scent of sweet peas and a dozen other flowers was about them. It was so still that the sound of the hollyhocks brushing against the wall, when some vagrant breath of air stirred them, made a soft caressing and soothing sound. Above the tree-tops a little infant moon peered at them shyly and in the west the white beacon of the evening star hung like a great jewel in a canopy of dark blue.

"How wonderful it all is, Margaret. Just to be alive is good. . . . It seems to me every time I come home that I love it more." Thor swept his strong, well-shaped hand toward the open land. "There is a feeling of kindness out here—of patience and ceaseless labor. . . . There is healing in the very air. Nature is a divine physician."

"Yes, Thor, I feel it. I think I understood that dimly as a child. . . . I remember I used to creep off by myself while mother was working, and just sit and sit in the sun. I always forgot my little aches and pains then. There was so much illness and misery down on the Flats. Someone was always suffering; someone was always hungry or cold or out of work and in dread of even worse to come. . . . I—I guess I never was young, Thor, and I found happiness only in those little moments in the sun. . . . How miserable the dark winter days were! Even now I am never quite myself in sunless weather."

"But now we're going to bring sunshine into many lives. Think what you can do for my patients, darling! Why, Margaret, you're born to comfort people. Oh, I don't understand how I was lucky enough to find you."

Then they forgot all their sweet philosophies and spoke only of the dear and tender things that all young lovers know so well.

A short while later Borga came out and joined them. She sat down in a little rocking-chair and soon the faint clicking of her needles made a pleasant sound in the stillness. She sat in the shadow, but at times a stray beam of light found her out and glittered on the swiftly moving bits of steel.

"I feel almost sorry that I have to leave all this, even for a time." Thor broke the silence. "No one place can ever be as dear. This is a great land. . . . These prairies are enthralling. . . . Sun-bathed and free and rolling unhindered to the sky. . . . They are so wide, so vast—there

is room for us all and all our opinions. They are like a broad mind unprejudiced and open to all improvement."

"But I should not like you to forget your Norse blood, my son. I cannot quite forget my fiords and my mountains," his mother said.

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead who never to himself has said: This is my own, my native land," her son reminded her. "I am not likely to forget the heritage of my fathers, but I can best prove my Norse blood by honoring this country which is mine."

He got up and, crossing to her side, bent down and kissed her. "Poor mamma! How strange is that charm of your bleak north sea which holds you even yet! And what do you remember of it but suffering? Why, this is your country, mother. Here where you've worked and struggled upwards. Here where your wilful babies grew into wilful big folk who pester your dear self with silly theories," he smiled into her face.

Borga smiled too, but the smile was wistful. She was thinking how wonderful he was, how like when he was a little boy telling her of his dream adventures and longing for the land beyond the setting sun. And she was grieving inwardly that he was so soon to leave her.

"Perhaps you are right, my son; but I've been so busy just working that somehow I've had little time to think of Canada as a country. It has just been a wilderness . . . a stubborn virgin prairie . . . and then—a farm."

Thor left in September and his mother settled down to wait and pray and subdue the loneliness of her empty nest.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SUNNY DAYS

The labour of the righteous tendeth to life.

Proverbs, 9:16.

The years sped on and with them much that had been familiar fled and much that was new had come instead. The Lindals were now removed from the haunting dread of penury. There would always be enough and more for them in their declining years. Bjorn was as proud as a boy when he learned to drive his shiny new Ford, and Borga, after the first inward qualm, developed a real mania for seeing the country fences whirl past. They were often very gay, the years falling from them miraculously, leaving them like two young things light-hearted and eager for adventure. It was good, after long hard years, to be freed from financial worry and still have comparative good health—for what are a few rheumatic pains, “just the growing pains of my soul,” Bjorn used to tell his wife when she worried over them. It is good also to look back upon a long lane and be satisfied, with, at the end, the same confident hand in one’s own as had clung so tightly at the beginning.

Then there were the children. Mr. and Mrs. Lindal had made one wonderful journey to Toronto, where Balder and Elizabeth now lived in a house which, to the simple parents, seemed truly a palace. A splendid house, one of many charming houses, yet somehow distinct from them, that spread to the east of the hill which rises upward from the teeming thoroughfares of the city. A tranquil home set like

a jewel in the heart of a beautiful garden overlooking a wide ravine.

Mrs. Fjelstad was now living with her son, and a very lovely picture she made sometimes of a summer's day sitting out in the quiet garden dressed in some soft silken gown, like a quaint old miniature come to life. There was also a little Anna now, a tiny flaxen-haired Anna that ran about the garden chasing butterflies or hung about her grandmamma begging for a story of "the little grey folk." Her grandmother prophesied that some day she would outshine her father, for "she has a real bird's voice," she declared. She was teaching the little lady to sing the folksongs of Iceland and when the tiny coming prima donna, whose tongue so readily prattled the English, made of them a somewhat weird word jumble, grandmamma grew quite huffy if the amused parents laughed.

And of an evening, when the little yellow head nestled sleepily against her daddy's breast, a most important formula was always gone through. Five tiny fingers had ever to be measured gravely and in turn against her father's strong supple hand. "So," measuring against his open palm, "this much more to grow, little pet, until you learn to play for daddy." Then the five wee fingers had to be named after the manner of the old Icelandic jingle, and then each one, so soft and pink-cushioned, kissed and put to bed.

Then there was Thor, a graduate now serving his months of probation at a large hospital. His poor mother had shivered often enough at his letters, they were so full of blood and bones and amputations. But she had been very proud when she learned how wonderfully he was fulfilling his ambition. His first operation had unnerved her as though she had been there. How unbelievable it seemed that her little boy was doing such things and how fearful she grew lest he should blunder. How she prayed that his courage would never waver. But his letters were not always of hospital matters. There were gay times and concerts and

fine people to meet, and once he had been excited at meeting a fellow countryman—"a man with the true Viking spirit, one who is going to do great things and prove to Canada the worth of her Icelandic subjects," he wrote her. This man, she learned, had once been a lad in the New Iceland settlement and now he had a wonderful theory concerning the far north.

Sometime later Thor wrote that if it were not for his love of surgery and the enthusiasm of the other doctors, he would throw up his profession and join this Icelandic in his conquest of the Polar countries. "For Vilhjalmur Stefansson will surely make good. . . . At times I get that old restless urge to be off somewhere, anywhere, to escape the everyday monotony," he ran on, "and then some new and terrible case comes up at the hospital and I know that my life belongs here."

After his eighteen months of hospital work ended he still stayed on because, as he wrote, there was much more that he wanted to learn, but he expected to come home some time in the fall or in the following spring.

The Johnsons were happy also. Einar and Finna were undoubtedly showing their age a little now, but it did not seem to darken Finna's days nor lessen her zest for life. Her Einar had not worked these last winters. "What with my Tomi still home and with no idea of getting married and papa owning four houses and getting such a good rent, there's no need for it . . . and such a waste of mustard plasters and liniment that it would be," she confided to Mrs. Olafson. Dear old Finna found it impossible to live without an attachment. When Elizabeth and Thor were gone she centered her interest and devotion upon Margaret. Mrs. Olafson had always entertained a warm friendship for the Johnsons since her first acquaintance with them, and they were old cronies by now.

Margaret had always been a welcome and frequent visitor while Thor lived with the Johnsons, and after he left she



formed the habit of dropping in to see her old friend on her way from school. They talked mostly of Thor and his wonderful progress and read for each other his faithful letters.

Only one cloud had dimmed the brightness of those years, for these simple folk. It was the death of their beloved Sjera Bjarni. But the Icelandic heart thrives on its sympathies and mellows with tears.

"It's just asleep he went, God rest him," Finna told her Einar, the ready tears welling from her kind old eyes. "Just asleep like a tired child. And in the morning they found him with the sun shining in upon his face. . . . It's a beautiful thing, Einar, to be a friend of God."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE CALL OF THE VALKYRIE!

Solomon, where is thy throne? It is gone in the wind.
Babylon, where is thy might? It is gone in the wind.
Who is the fortunate? *He who in anguish hath pined*
He shall rejoice when his relics are dust in the wind.

—James Mangan.

When, in June, the papers blazed out with the killing of a certain Austrian at Sarajevo, it made but little impression upon the Lindals. Bjorn thought it peculiar that such things were so common among civilised peoples, and Borga admitted that it seemed strange.

"Why, we haven't had a murder in Iceland for more than ninety years."

Then they forgot all about it.

When Germany declared war upon France, it was the same. It surprised them mildly, but after all it was none of their affair. Even when Great Britain had declared that honor should remain honor as long as her islands stood, it scarcely impressed them. Bjorn read more thoroughly and patiently, that was all. In a dim way he was sure that this action was just and that Germany had suddenly gone mad. Why, he had always considered it as a land of music and mild-mannered men!

The tragedy of Belgium did not affect them unduly. To be sure, it was dreadful. But then, why will men fight! And, after all, as great horrors, though perhaps not similar, had been endured by Iceland, yet the whole world had not sat down to weep about it. They were inclined to think

much of it press exaggeration and then after all they thought: this can't last so long. With all these powers against her Germany must acknowledge her mistake.

Then one day Borgia got a letter from her son. "I'm coming home," he wrote, "to join up." She sat down weakly and handed the letter to Bjorn.

"I—I— Read it, papa. Is it there?" she asked fearfully.

Bjorn was shaken too. "Yes, Borgia."

She felt suddenly an overpowering feeling of rage. "Why, he mustn't throw away his ambition just to join a silly squabble! What is it to us that these nations fight? Can't they defend themselves? What has my son to do with it? My son for whom I've hoped and prayed and endured all hardships silently."

Bjorn had not seen things very clearly, but now somehow it awakened in him the old warring spirit of his ancient race.

"Hush, mamma; you don't know what you say. Have you forgotten how our fathers fought to defend what they thought right? Thor is a man now and master of his own soul."

But she was just a poor maddened mother. What did they matter to her, these reasons? He was her little son. He had been dearly bought. She did not intend giving him up lightly. She had often listened with surprise to many Caldwell women talking of their sons and husbands about to leave for the front. They had seemed to her to be thinking only of the uniforms and some trivial glory. She did not believe that they loved as she loved; that they had fought against hardships as she had fought and endured all things silently in the faith that her son might yet become a real power in the community.

The noisy cheering and clamoring had seemed to her silly and childish and hypocritical. "These folk pretend not to favor war," she had once said to Bjorn while listening to a recruiting officer at Caldwell, "yet see how they swallow

the flatteries of war. On Sundays they pray with their lips to the Good Shepherd of Galilee, but for the remaining six days worship in their hearts the Red War God with his noisy bugles and his blaring drums. . . . I cannot somehow understand it. Were it not better to fight openly and honestly like our Norse fathers did, believing it the one true course . . . without hypocrisy, without wailing?"

And now, like a sentence of death, the news of her son's decision fell upon her. This dreadful maelstrom which she had considered indifferently, as one stands by and watches a street brawl, half disgusted, half amused, was drawing her only son into its wrath. That greedy hand of hate had reached out from across the sea and tapped at her door. That word "*war*," which she had spoken glibly enough before, burned her lips now. It had at last become real.

The days before Thor's coming were terrible to her. She moved in a continual nightmare. All manner of evils haunted her, awake or asleep. She performed her tasks mechanically and painfully. Poor Bjorn was more worried about her than he was about his son.

Then Thor came. So strong, so straight, so like all her fondest hopes of him. He was amazed at her fears. So wonderfully gay, laughing away her gloom, that the contagion finally laid hold of her and to Bjorn's relief she was something like herself again.

"Why, what a foolish mother you are. This is so great an opportunity for me that I feel almost ashamed. . . . I will be learning by the sufferings of others, whereas if I were half the man your old heroes were I'd go as a plain soldier and die in the scrap."

The lightly spoken words tore deep into his mother's heart. Death! How lightly do we speak of it! How lightly do we relegate others to its chill hands! She saw suddenly with increased horror the cruelty and wretchedness of war. Why, all those bravely uniformed lads, marching line on line into oblivion, were just little boys grown tall. Someone had

cradled them against a loving breast, someone had dreamed and prayed for them. . . . For are not mothers the same the world over?

"Oh, Thor, it is cruel! It is cruel! I cannot let you go," she cried.

He was a little disappointed in her, for no man will ever understand what a mixture of weakness and strength a woman is—how, the more a mother she is, the less likely she will be to see beyond the narrow precincts of the family. She who would kill with soft hands an enemy of her home and children would be the first to shrink in terror at the thought of distant carnage.

He had expected her to be brave, to applaud his attitude, to uphold him in his decision. He did not know that it is cheap courage which does not first sound the depths of terror and weakness. It is like that watery virtue which, never having been tempted, patronises the sinner in his ash-heap.

"You should be the last to talk that way, mother—you who taught me to idolize the northern warrior. . . . You who showed me the glories of brave deeds."

"Oh, Thor, don't make me believe that this is my doing. What was good and brave in an age of barbarism isn't necessarily worthy now. . . . Men had no heaven but Valhalla then, so they died as befitted their belief."

"And we believe in liberty now . . . it befits us also to die according to our faith," he answered her a little sharply. It pained him to witness her agitation and, man-like, this gave edge to his utterance. She looked at him blankly, some new thought struggling at the back of her mind. He took her into his arms. "After all, mother, am I not going to patch up the poor fellows who get the worst of it?"

Slowly, like a caress, the comfort of his words crept over her. The sons of other women, broken, dying, might be given new life because of him. She breathed heavily, battling with her tears, then straightened up and smiled at him.

"Very well, Thor . . . it is doubtless best that you go."

Not many days later they learned that Tomi Johnson had also joined. And then a letter from Elizabeth informed them that Balder was going to give a series of concerts for patriotic purposes. "He feels it so much that he can't do more, but, frankly, mamma, I thank God now that he is lame," she wrote. Over night as it were the entire calm world they had lived in seemed invaded and overrun by this battle spirit whose throne was across the sea.

But howsoever one may grieve or rejoice for a day or for an hour, the common levels again claim one. The daily tasks are as relentless as any crowned tyrant. It is impossible to escape them. So, after the first harassing days, the Lindals and the Johnsons fell back into their old habits again. The boys were in training, but there were letters and little visits, and affairs were not half as bad as they might be.

Then when the time drew near for the battalion to go overseas, Thor wrote that he would like his mother to come to Winnipeg to see the dress parade which was to take place on a certain date that month.

Borga and Finna indulged in a luxurious cry when they met and fell upon each other's bosoms.

"It's not myself can understand it at all—this fighting in a world with plenty for honest folk," Finna burst out in a hoarse voice. "And such dreadful things we see in the papers, God pity us. . . . But it's a fine soldier my Tomi makes, and that's a fact!"

The day of the parade dawned clear and cloudless. It was a typical prairie day, the air clean and sweet, with the whole city looking somehow scoured and brisk in the silver brightness of the autumn sunshine.

Borga and Finna stationed themselves down on the corner of Hargrave and Portage. It was becoming quite a common sight to see the soldiers in that day, but nevertheless a large crowd was gathering to view this battalion which

was so soon to follow the many others that had left the gates of the great prairie city.

They were calm enough in outward appearance. An Ice-lander, though incurably a sentimentalist, never displays his heart on his sleeve, nor, if humanly possible, shares his sorrow with the outside world. But their hearts were very heavy, very pain-filled and sore. They had suffered much, those two aged women, and their faith had been mighty. Yet now what terrors did not threaten the labor of their years?

Somewhere a band began playing. It was as yet far off, but how clear and distinct the air reached them—sound travels so far on the prairie. Borga was not familiar with these English tunes, but some strange exaltation took possession of her. There was the lure of the siren in that music, there was a peculiar inviting power in the din of the big drum. It beat into the air and the rhythm that followed it became a spirit with beckoning hands. "Come! . . . Come! . . . Come! . . . Come! . . . Come! . . ." That was what it said. She thought she understood now how one might leap over a precipice to follow that command.

There followed a silence when only the passing traffic and the buzz of voices filled the air. Then in loud and noisy blaring the band broke out again. The brown ranks were nearing now, and an occasional cheer burst from the people. But for the most part there was silence except for the band and the marching feet. Winnipeg had given up her first noisy demonstrations. She had settled down to grim duty.

Borga watched with unaccountable fascination the oncoming men. Some long-forgotten pride awoke in her. It was impressive, this sight, and it was part of her somehow, for somewhere in the ranks was her son. The centuries are long since the sons of Iceland lived by war. It takes much sometimes to rekindle the old desires. But it is doubtful whether there will not always lie buried in the Icelandic heart a certain dangerous fire—just as the icebound moun-

tains of his country hide, howsoever deep, their deadly flames.

The chill which had benumbed her was, in some strange way, dissipated, and in its stead a fervor which she scarcely understood laid hold of her. The brown ranks were nearing now . . . they were passing . . . they were so fine, so eager, so full of life, those marching men! The two women leaned forward in their anxiety lest they miss something, and in their eagerness to catch, if might be, a glimpse of their own boys.

Finna gave a little strangled cry and clapped a hand over her mouth. She would have felt eternally disgraced to give way to emotion on the public thoroughfare.

"Look! look! My little Tomi! Isn't he the man for you now!"

Then they saw Thor, splendid in his young manhood, his fine head high and proud, his broad shoulders squared as if against whatsoever winds. They followed the swing of his lithe strong body as long as they could . . . and still the boys swept on.

They gazed after them, those two old mothers, and the heavy march of the soldiers' feet beat upon their brains and echoed in their sore hearts.

"Left . . . Right . . . Left . . . Right . . ."

The steady, unhurried rhythm of marching feet . . . the measured and unperturbed heartbeat of the British nation.

"Left . . . Right . . . Left . . . Right . . ."

Ceaseless—strong—powerful! Who should stop it!

Borga gazed after them with ineffable yearning. For the first time in her life she thought of Canada as a dear and precious possession—these soldiers had somehow made it so. . . . They were hers, somehow, these marching men. They might have been an army of ancient Norsemen, so dear they seemed. She strained her eyes. They were turning the

corner of Portage and Main, and that magnetic music was again ringing through the air.

Ahead of them, these men for whom she now felt such possessive love, she saw, not a white silken banner with its raven mascot, but that tri-colored badge of a great empire of honor—the Flag of Britain—a holy thing, created so by her immortal heroes and sustained in that holiness by her loyal children.

The battalion was for some unforeseen reason delayed and did not leave as soon as had been expected. Thor was able, therefore, to obtain permission to make a last little visit to the farm. Those were precious days for the old parents and after he left Borga put his room to rights just as though he were still with them, a practice which she kept up for many months.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A CAKE AND A CORPORAL

And certes, in fair virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind.

—Burns.

In the months that followed, the first bitterness and the first poignant fears gradually wore away. It became a less disturbing and anxious thing to open a newspaper. Thor wrote very little of himself and less of the actual war. It was only of the extraordinary cures that he told them. He was in a base hospital now, but the fever of war had possession of him. He longed to be dispatched as a field surgeon. There was no apathy in his messages; they teemed with interest and life and courage . . . for it takes courage to patch the hideous rents of torn and reeking flesh, and to chisel and hew at the living bone. His parents were becoming somewhat reconciled. It was impossible not to recognize the immense good of his daily duties.

One day when they read how the use of certain delicate silver plates had made an apparently hopeless limb useful again, Björn laid down the letter and shook his head gravely. "Think of that being our little Thor's work! Who would have thought it, when he ran about the marshes on the old homestead, or fished for his bits of bark in the river? It's all very wonderful to me, mamma."

Borga was gazing out of the window at the same rolling wheatfield which had been her alternate hope and sorrow. She remembered the year when its yield should have sent Thor to college and how it had failed her, and she also

remembered how fruitfully it had recompensed them later. That same plot of ground now patiently waiting its harvest, had made those long years at Chicago possible. What was it her son had once said about healing in the land? . . . Well, that sea of waving yellow grain out there had certainly given life anew to many bruised souls. She stood in silence gazing out upon the field, seeing it a soft amber blur through her tears. "Yes, papa, it is a miracle," she answered at last.

The threshing over, Mrs. Lindal decided to make a visit to Winnipeg. There were several things she wanted to buy at Eaton's. When she reached her old friend's house, it was to find Mrs. Johnson in a fever of excitement.

"Why, what is it?" Borga sniffed the air. "It smells like Christmas."

"Well, and so it might be, dear Mrs. Lindal, but just you come here and tell me do you think it's done." Finna led Borga out into the kitchen, where a huge fruitcake sat in true magnificence in the center of the table. Borga laid a testing finger on the cake.

"It certainly seems done to me. And how it smells! Good gracious, Finna, what's it for, a wedding?"

Finna wiped a moist brow with her apron and, head on side, considered the cake affectionately.

"Tish, Mrs. Lindal, what a nonsense! It's for my Tomi." They laughed together gaily.

"But it's big enough for a regiment," Borga said. "A pretty penny it's cost you, too, with sugar so high!"

Finna chuckled. "And isn't that the truth. Picture it! What a price now for a little sweetness! But it's yourself don't know the news; that I can see. . . . Why, my Tomi's an officer now!" There was no hiding the pride in her voice.

They shook hands gravely—as if it were an international affair, or as if the honest Tomi had been made a general, at least.

"Is he a lieutenant, maybe?" Borga asked.

"My, no!" Finna was vehement. "He's a corporal!" It had a most important sound that, to Finna. She had an idea it must be something tremendously important. Borga was a bit better versed in the mysteries of army rank, but she saw no need to disillusion her old friend.

"So you're sending him a cake," she said, smiling.

"Yes, and it's a bite I'm thinking he should have for his men, God bless him! Picture it, now, Mrs. Lindal! It's just a ditch they live in, poor things, with maybe the rats and water running all around them. . . . And maybe worse! It's a queerness, I'm thinking, if an old woman like me, with more than she needs, can't make them a bit of a cake, and that's the truth."

Over their coffee cups they talked of many things, but always, in spite of them, came back to the one topic which absorbed their every secret thought. Someone they knew had been wounded, another was dead, and yet another was coming home disabled.

"How glad I am that dear Sjera Bjarni was spared seeing so many of our boys snatched from life this way," Borga said. "It would have broken his heart, he who believed in mercy and kindness and tolerance."

Finna nodded. Then with one of those spiritual flashes which so often revealed to her unlettered mind the kernels of great truths, she said:

"But it's when I think of my dear Thor and them that's like him that I say to myself, 'Well, now, Finna, our God is still with us; He walks those awful fields with the brave doctors.' And it's Christ himself I'm thinking lends skill to their hands."

Not many days after this Margaret was spending the day with Mrs. Johnson. It was Saturday and she had come over early in order to help with some quilting on a quilt which was to be raffled at the Good Templars for the relief of some



unfortunate member. She always looked forward to these days with good Mrs. Johnson—there was such cheer and comfort to be had from her quaint counsels. And as with many another girl, she found it infinitely easier to share her thoughts of Thor with this free-hearted old lady, than with her own somewhat reserved mother.

They had just set the frames up and had sorted out the red and purple yarn, when the postman struck the door a sharp blow and flung in a letter. Finna flew to get it. "Why whatever! It's not a writing I know." Her hand trembled. "Here, read it, dearie."

Margaret was frightened. How women did tremble at such things in those days! Then she caught the letter and after reading a few lines, laughed shakily and kissed Finna's anxious old cheek, so close to her own.

"Why, it's nothing much, Mrs. Johnson. He's in a hospital but he's doing well . . . it's a little nurse who wrote the letter."

The relief was so great that he should at least be alive, that his poor mother scarcely thought what it might mean, his being in a hospital. Then the thought struck her.

"It's not his legs are off or anything, is it, Margaret?" she asked, anxious and terrified.

But Margaret had begun laughing again, gaily this time. She caught her surprised old friend around the waist, squeezing her bearishly.

"You could never imagine what's happened," she exclaimed, holding Mrs. Johnson at arm's length mischievously.

"Well, would you now! Whatever is it? Is he a captain maybe, and all his legs on him?"

"Oh, his legs are all right, or at least they will be. One of them was pretty badly fractured. But he's coming home as soon as he gets his discharge."

Mrs. Johnson did not quite understand her. Then she went into religious rapture.

"But that's not all," Margaret went on, giggling merrily, "he's going to bring a wife with him when he comes."

Mrs. Johnson straightened up stiffly, looking at her coldly.

"What did you say, woman?"

"He's bringing a little French girl home with him," Margaret explained.

"Well, now we have a light!" said the indignant Finna. "Oh, the hussy! It's one of them old maids we hear tell of and it's my little Tomi she's made a fool of when he was out of his head. Oh, the poor lad! Picture it, Margaret, me with a foreign woman and an idol worshipper, maybe, messing around in my nice kitchen. It's not a meal for a Christian—I'll be thinking she can cook. It's what I've always said, they're blind, poor things, blind as moles, stone blind, Margaret!"

"But she's just a young girl, Mrs. Johnson . . . just seventeen. Tomi met her in some deserted village, half dead. Her parents had both been shot by the Germans. They had been inn-keepers and had displeased them." An incredulous expression spread over Finna's face.

"What did you say, woman? Is it a child she is?"

"Just a girl, the letter says," Margaret reassured her.

"Well, now we have a light! I repeat it. And is it the cradle he's robbing the minute he's out of his mother's care? Oh, the young Turk. If I could just lay hands on him . . . The poor little thing, the poor little thing! And it's her own dear parents they shot is it? The sons of Satan! Well, now picture it! And won't it be a gladness to cheer the little creature. It's a sad world, Margaret, what with Germans and high prices and such like. But now, what do you think, would you get a pink or a blue paper for the bedroom? It's not likely she's had a sweet place to lay her little head for a long while, God bless her!"

Margaret laughed and hugged the dear old lady again. She realized how fortunate this little exile would be. She knew, too, what happiness Mrs. Johnson would find in having

someone of her own to lavish her love upon to the end of her generous days.

"She's a lucky girl to have your son," she told his mother.

"And isn't it the truth! It's a good husband he'll be and that I'll see to. Well, picture it, what my Einar will say, we with a daughter now in our old age." She wiped a suspiciously bright eye. "It's a good God we have, Margaret, and that's the truth."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FLAMING AUTUMN WOODS

Passion and mystery murmur through the leaves,
Passion and mystery, touched by deathless pain,
Whose monotone of long, low anguish grieves
For something lost that shall not live again!

—*P. H. Hayne.*

One afternoon in early September, Borga stepped to the doorway when she heard the old Ford wheeze and come to a stop. Bjorn had been to town. The way he stumbled down from his seat and up the path, told her more certainly than words that something dreadful had befallen him. The blood from her heart beat in sharp little hammers against her throat. He did not have to tell her—only one thing could bring that chill to her soul. Something had happened to Thor. She sank down weakly in the old rocker on the porch. It seemed years before Bjorn reached her. His face was ashen. Like a drowning man he caught at the weather-beaten railing.

“Bjorn!”

It was a cry of age-old anguish.

“God help you, Borga . . . he is dead!”

She was scarcely aware of any further emotion. Something laid hold of her senses. They seemed to reel and nothing was very clear. The full meaning of his words had somehow escaped her in that first benumbing pain. Then out of that despair, like a swimmer coming to the surface for air, she was lifted upon a wave of angry resentment.

“Why, there was no God! It was all lies, lies! To keep one like dumb brutes toiling patiently! For what benefit?”

. . . That some idler might enjoy the spoils of one's labor." She lived again in one terrible moment the years of her maidenhood. She thought of all her own mother had suffered. She recalled her pathetic faith in this strange God who looked down coldly while those who loved Him best were scattered like chaff in the wind. She remembered again the last words of that patient broken mother: "It doesn't matter about me, Borga. . . . You will live to rejoice in this great new country. . . . God is good; He forgets not the cry of His children."

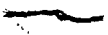
Yet this was the answer to all their prayers, hers and her mother's. All they had asked was to be allowed their peaceful ways, to be permitted to become useful in their new country. Some of the old superstition which still lingers in Icelandic minds darkened her thought. "There's a curse on me and mine! There is no God!" she cried.

Bjorn tried to comfort her, but she pushed him away harshly. For the first time in her life she resented his nearness. Why, he had thought it wise that Thor should go. She sat staring stonily over the garden, the same garden that he had loved . . . there were the peonies, blood red and proud, that he had once planted.

Bjorn looked at her and groaned. If she only would weep. Then he stumbled down from the porch and without conscious desire went towards his stables.

He opened the big barn. The restless stamping of feet greeted him. A dapple mare lifted her head above the stanchion and whinnied. He stepped to her side, laying a fond hand upon her flank. Then, dropping his worn old head upon her warm back, he wept as he had never known that man might weep.

Horses have no souls, say the wise, but they have hearts and keen sympathies. The grey mare, always a restless timid beast, stood patiently quiet. Something of her kind old master's trouble must have been plain to her. When he grew more calm, Bjorn became aware of a soft nose nuzzling



him. He patted her silently, his heart very full. Then stepping to the loft, he sent down a shower of sweet new hay. The other horses lifted eager heads. He remembered them also.

This done he sat a while on an old overturned barrel. It was somehow comforting to sit there. The satisfied munching of his horses, the silky rustling of tossed hay, and the heavy odor of warm flesh were familiar and gratifying. The grey mare looked at him again from soft brown eyes. He had a feeling that she was anxious about him. When he got up to go he stopped at her stall to stroke her sleek curved neck. "Poor brute, you also toil faithfully. . . . Then you die." She whinnied shrilly, striking the floor with a sharp hoof as Bjorn shut the barn doors behind him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SUNSET TRAIL

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Await alike th' inevitable hour:—
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

—Gray.

The small Icelandic world was shaken by the news of Thor's death. There had much been known of his work as a doctor and much expected of him in the future. To them it meant not only the loss of a promising countryman, it meant that there was lost to them one other opportunity to prove the merit of Iceland's sons wherever they may be.

Mrs. Johnson was heartbroken. She was sick in bed with the grippe when Margaret, like a pale ghost, came to tell her of Thor's death. They wept in each other's arms and Finna made a promise to herself that as soon as she was about again she would go out to her dear Mrs. Lindal.

Margaret bore the news with surprising courage. She had been trained in a hard school. She had been so accustomed to miseries as a child that the later happy years were like some delightful dream. It seemed natural that they should not last forever. It was terrible to lose him, yet it would have been more terrible still not to have had him to lose. She wept a little for herself, but the thought which mostly haunted her was the one that he had wanted to do so much for humanity, but had been cut off in the very beginning of his career.

It was on her second visit to Finna that the good woman

saw a look of exaltation in Margaret's face. Such a look as the religious zealots of old must have worn, such a look as Joan of Arc must have had, when she decided to seek an audience with the king.

"I have resigned my school," she told Mrs. Johnson as soon as she had removed her wraps. "I'm entering St. Boniface hospital next month."

Finna wondered for one surprised moment just why. Then she understood.

"Oh, my dearie, and it's his work you want to carry on. . . . Picture it, what a goodness!"

Margaret smiled a little crooked smile. "He used to say I was born to comfort people. . . . I think he would like it."

The weeks following Thor's death were very terrible for his parents. They were torn alternately with the agony of their grief and lost in a cloud of unreality. It seemed to them at times that this could not be; that such misery could not have overtaken them and left them still alive. It was like the crucifixion of all that was best within them; of all that they had been or ever had hoped to be.

Not the least of Bjorn's suffering was caused by the impregnable wall of restraint which Borga erected between them. He stood apart, dumb and helpless before it. His own grief was thus augmented by his inability to share the greater suffering of his wife. He wandered about like a stranger unwanted and unasked in his own house.

Yet, despite all that he endured, he knew it was as nothing compared to Borga's agony. To see her who had always been so brave, so hopeful in adversity, moving about in a dull helpless way, passionless, tearless, like a body which somehow continued to live though its soul was dead, was more intolerable than all else.

He had his moments of dark despair. He, too, had hoped to live again in Thor. There were hours when there rushed upon him all the old impotency of bygone days, a feeling

of useless struggle against overwhelming odds and it seemed as if life had been indeed worse than useless.

But nevertheless his daily duties gradually lessened the pain in his heart. Somehow the performance of these tasks, had in it a very real healing. In the simple ministering to his animals he derived a sense of power. They depended on him, those faithful dumb creatures. It was pleasant not to fail them. Their gratitude was balm to his harried spirit.

He knew that Borga, struggling through her mechanical tasks, had no such consolation, yet her woman's heart had even greater need of it. For a woman's heart has so been fashioned that only in spending its sympathy can it gain comfort unto itself.

She went her way wrapped in an impenetrable mantle doing her tedious work in fits and starts, or sat, dry-eyed and silent, hour after hour staring out upon the garden where the flowers Thor had planted still bloomed unchanged and cheerfully.

At first the kindly neighbors had tried to visit her to express their sympathy, but they were puzzled and repelled by her strange behavior. After all they could not comprehend her restrained Norse nature. But they respected her grief none the less and so left her to herself.

One evening a man from the next farm came to tell Mr. Lindal that the people of Caldwell had decided to hold a memorial service for Thor in the Methodist church. He did not go to the house with his news but chose a time when he knew Bjorn would be out in the barn milking.

Bjorn could find no fitting reply. He kept on with his milking. After a moment's silence the neighbor cleared his throat, bit into a slab of very black tobacco and made some remark about the season's grain. They exchanged views about the grades of wheat and prevailing prices, but they were too polite and agreed too readily one with the other. Bjorn knew and his neighbor knew that their words were meaningless.

"Well, I'll be getting along, Bjorn. There's a' heap of things to be done yet, this night."

"Goodnight, neighbor," said Bjorn, "and thank you kindly."

But the man was already out of earshot. Bjorn leaned his head against the flank of the staid old cow he was milking. There was a mist before his eyes and his knotted old hands were very unsteady. "When you come right down to it," he thought, "folk are pretty much alike whatever their nationality."

Simple as it seemed Bjorn found it hard to break the news to Borga, and infinitely harder to persuade her that she must go; that courtesy due her neighbors made it an obligation and duty toward her son a command. . . .

The day for the memorial dawned warm and bright, one of those golden autumn days when summer seems to turn back for a last smiling visit and leaves behind her the fragrance of accumulated stores. The Lindals were very quiet as they drove into the town in their shabby old car, and a silence fell upon the crowd of people gathered outside the church when they made their appearance. There was deference in the way a path opened for them that they might walk in solitary dignity up to the old weatherbeaten building.

Borga was hardly aware of her surroundings. She sat like an image of stone staring into her lap. Only an occasional twitching of her work-scarred hands betrayed life and emotion. Even the choir, singing its much-rehearsed anthem, a beautiful and appropriate selection, failed to arouse her to a sense of reality. Perhaps for all its hopefulness, it was above the simple needs of her soul. It lacked the unfailing appeal of elemental music, of songs that have poured from the heart of a people. Bjorn looked at her anxiously when the minister began his speech. He laid a trembling hand on her knee.

"Try to listen, mamma," he implored. There was something very childish and pathetic in his voice. It brought him closer than he had been for days. With an effort of will she forced herself to follow the minister's words.

The cadence of his voice seemed to reach her as from a long distance, and slowly, as one discerns objects through a heavy fog, his face and something of his personal magnetism became real to her.

He seemed not so much to be moralizing as simply telling his audience of Thor, of the splendid service he had rendered; of the human wrecks he had salvaged and of the supreme grandeur of his death.

"To die in the arms of the Valkyrie—victor in a glorious cause—such was ever the Norseman's ideal! Yet how much more sublime to lay down one's life in an endeavor to save another. . . ."

It renewed her agony to hear him describe Thor's last sacrifice. He seemed to carry her into that awful mire at Passchendaele that she might see him there, her splendid son with his rigid arms still fast about his companion.

A young girl, with sun-gold hair sitting near her, sobbed and buried her little face in a limp handkerchief. Borga stared at her with dimmed eyes thinking how much she looked like some compassionate angel.

From the front of the church a child's wail pierced through the minister's sonorous tones. The sound tore its way like a sword into Borga's paralyzed heart. A moment later there was a little stir, a scraping of feet, and she saw coming down the aisle a slight, black-clad figure leading a very rebellious little boy.

As the woman hurried past, apologetic and ashamed, Borga saw her face, grief-stricken and streaked in tears. With all the effects of a shock she recognized her. Why, it was Mrs. Lee! Her husband had been killed not so long before Thor.

For the first time in all these awful weeks her thoughts

reverted to another. Little hammers of pain beat in her temples and tore at her throat. She longed to rush out after her, to fold her and her sorrow in mothering arms. That little boy—how dear he must be! But how long the road his little feet must yet be led!

Like one awaking from a heavy sleep she glanced about her. Everywhere were faces stamped with sympathy. The significance of it all flooded her soul with a kind of terrible splendor. That these people were all assembled to pay honor to her dead was in itself a little thing—humanity had often enough rendered homage to tyrants and false gods—but their tears, their sympathy, these were as gems of imperishable beauty!

She looked at Bjorn and saw him as he was, old and tired, with the honest tears following the furrows of his darkly tanned face. She was so dazed with these new emotions that only an occasional phrase from the minister's steady drone conveyed any meaning to her. She was as one who, having scaled a mountain peak, stands mute and wondering before the glories spread about her.

"What can we say that has not already been said," the minister's voice went on. "How can we hope to comfort these aged parents who have sacrificed so much. . . . To live usefully and to die nobly—this is not death but victory . . . Your son who is dead yet liveth. He lives on in the life of our country."

Borga heard no more. Her whole soul was in a turmoil and her eyes were heavy with unshed tears. When the service ended she caught Bjorn's hand and together they stumbled rather than walked out of the church. Everywhere people nodded at them yet stepped aside to let them pass. They were grateful for this kindness.

In the vestibule the minister met them. He took their rough old hands and wrung them hard and in silence walked with them to their old car.

When he had helped Borga in her seat, she held out her

hands to him in wordless gratitude. He was an Englishman and she an Icclander. But they looked each into the other's soul and found they had a common heritage.

As they turned into the homeward road, the sun seemed to strike the autumn woods into brilliant color.

"When I die, mamma, I hope it will be fall with the woods all on flame like a ship of some sea king."

From the dim years it reached her. She sobbed and burst into tears. Bjorn caught his breath sharply. His heart ached for her. Yet he was hopeful now that the storm was breaking.

Out of her greatest misery Iceland's songs have risen. It is as natural to the Icelandic heart to turn to poetry in times of stress as for another to search his Bible. Borga suddenly remembered all the things that Thor had loved. All his stray fancies came rushing to her mind. One might have thought him close beside her to whisper them. . . .

"To sail and sail into the sunset," so had he dreamed as a child. . . . And now they speak of "going west."

Ahead of them the golden sun was fast slipping down the heavens. It was like a ball of flame, a golden world dropping into some unseen space.

Sailed into the fiery sunset,
Sailed into the purple vapours,
Sailed into the dusk of evening. . . .

Something like that he had read for her when a boy. She felt as if she were following the passage of his soul.

When they turned in at the farm a boy from a neighboring place came to meet them.

"Thought I'd do the chores for you to-night, Mr. Lindal," he said, half shyly.

And somehow this unlooked for kindness broke down the rest of Borga's resentment against a cruel world. She smiled after the lad as he went off to the barn and, turning to Bjorn, fell upon his bosom.

"How wicked I've been! How I've neglected you, as if you too did not suffer. . . . And after all how kind folks are."

He patted her and kissed her faded cheek. "There, there, dear, I've suffered most for you."

When in the house they saw that a telegram was lying on the table for them. The neighbor boy must have brought it. Idly Bjorn opened it. Then he gave an exclamation of surprise—

"Mamma!"

Borga's heart sank. What now, she wondered? But Bjorn was smiling.

He gave her the telegram. It was from Balder:

"Born October tenth—Thor the Second—Everything well," was what she read.

They smiled at each other a little wistfully. Then without a word Borga left the room and Bjorn knew that she was going to Thor's bedroom, the room she had kept in perfect order against his coming.

She opened it softly as if it were a sanctuary. It was so still, so peaceful. The last rays of the sun fell upon the window and a wavering thread of gold lay upon the white counterpane of his bed. Here were all his things. . . . the fishing pole and a tennis racket leaned against the wall. Here, too, were his clothes, hung so orderly under the shelf where his old hats and caps lay. There on the long table in the middle of the room were several books just as he had left them. And against the wall his old bookcase containing his most precious belongings . . . books that he had loved at various stages. And there, too, was a picture of Margaret in a little silver frame. How those things tugged at her heart strings! How unbelievably strong is the voice of the dead. How immeasurably sweet the simple things they have touched and tended.

She walked haltingly to the table and sat down. That first terrible bitterness was over but there remained in her

heart the anguish of those that once long since watched at a certain sepulchre. Mechanically she opened his books just because it was good to lay hand on something that had been his. She sat so a long while. Then crossing to the bed, smoothed with her tired old hands the white pillow. . . .

The God of a hundred faithful ancestors called her, and falling on her knees she wept and prayed as only those that have known Gethsemane can pray. When she arose there was on her face the stamp of resignation. She had looked upon her dead and seen that it was well.

It was growing dusk now. She stepped to the window and gazed out over the land. The field that had been yellow gold not long since, lay now under the deepening sky, shorn and barren. Yet how calm and patient it awaited the distant spring. Off to the left the willows stirred occasionally as if their thoughts disturbed them. How ruddy they looked in their ragged autumn dress. Just one end of the garden was visible. She caught the red and blue of her aster bed . . . hardy flowers those, cheering one in the fall of the year. How still it all was, how peaceful. Down in the pasture a cow bell jingled and trailed away sleepily. Somewhere a bird shrilled once and then no more.

There crept over her and all about her that calm of the spirit which only great renunciations bring. In that stillness she grew strong, for it is only when the heart gives up its pining and resentment that the peace of God flows in. . . .

I walk down the Valley of Silence—
Down the dim, voiceless valley—alone;
And I hear not the sound of a footstep
Around me, save God's and my own;
And the hush of my heart is as holy
As hovers where angels have flown!

She had found in that covert the strength to take up anew the duties of life. There swept upon her a sudden passion

for this wide, quiet land. And once again as if he were beside her she seemed to hear his words—,

Breathes there a man with soul so dead. . . .

Was that it, then? A sob caught her throat. Had she been so busy working for the daily bread that this other, this spiritual necessity, had escaped her. . . . Had he died that she might find her soul?

This Canada, which had demanded much of them—it was her country. This peace which was hers he had paid for, just as she had paid a heavy price that he might live. . . . The old saying of her fathers flashed into her mind: "All things with blood and toil are bought, all joys are cleansed in tears." What was it that kind-faced minister had said? . . . "Your son is dead yet liveth, he lives in the life of his country."

She wiped her eyes, brushed back her hair, and walked with a firm tread out of the little room, closing the door softly behind her. "In the life of *my* country," she whispered to herself as she went down the stairs.

Bjorn was sitting hunched forward in his old chair by the stove. He had lit the fire and it cast a mellow gleam upon the darkened floor. The kettle sang and hummed, making a merry sound. He looked up anxiously as she entered and he could have wept for the look he saw on her face.

"Oh, Borga," he cried brokenly.

She crossed to him swiftly, strong now, and comforted him in his weakness. After a little she went to the pantry door, took down her white apron, tied it on slowly and walked to the stove.

"I think I'll get some blue and yellow yarn . . . and knit little Thor some socks," she said.

Bjorn, watching her at the old, old tasks . . . setting the table, steeping her coffee, cutting the bread, wondered if, after all, this was not the greatest courage. For

to perform a great deed in a moment of exultation is but like singing a song from a full heart, but to turn one's hand to the plough though the heart be broken—that is supreme courage.

For in such strength alone do nations live, have their beginnings and everlasting power. Out of the hearts of men, out of their joys and tears, their toil and tribulation, springs that elusive and holy thing, the Soul of a Nation.

Out of the sore travailings of men and out of their quiet death, spring hope and faith, and that great love which, transcending the grave, revitalizes life and makes a nation indestructible.

THE END

